CHOUDHURY SHAMSUR RAHMAN

LIFE IN EAST PAKISTAN

Pakistan Co-operative Book Society Ltd.,
Chittagong : Dacca : Sylhet : Karachi :

Publisher:
Pakistan Co-operative Book Society Ltd.,
Chittagong, Dacca, Sylhet and Karachi.

Printer:
East Bengal Government Press,
Tejgaon, Dacca.

First Edition:
March, 1956.

Price:
Rupees Two & Annas eight (2-8-) only.

FOREWORD

Books on East Pakistan, particularly in English, are still very rare. The soil of the area is extremely fertile and it is one of the most thickly populated regions of the world. It suffered neglect during the British period. It is now coming into its own. Foreigners want to know more about this area and its people. It was in Dacca (Jahangirnagar) that the Muslim League, which won Pakistan for the Muslims of Indo-Pakistan sub-continent, was born in 1906. Chittagong (Islamabad) is the main port which was well-known to the early sea-farers long before Calcutta was established on the banks of the Hooghly. This river-fed area is inhabited by people who are lovers of peace and who attach greater value to cultural and spiritual activities than mundane affairs. This land of plenty encouraged artistic development and the Dacca Muslin, woven by local weavers, was famous all over the world for its delicate texture and perfect weave. In recent times the pressure of population on the soil has become intense and effiorts have been made to establish big industries. The low standard of living has to be raised. Both the Central and the Provincial Governments have been working together to bring about improvement in living conditions. Freedom, which came in 1947, has brought many rights and also big responsibilities. Every one of us realises now that it is a great thing to be master of ones own destiny. Things have moved quite fast since 1947, but it is hoped that the pace of economic development will go faster.

The present book touches various facts of life in East Pakistan. It is written in a racy, light style. The Pakistan Co-operative Book Society have decided to publish it as they feel that this will help to spread knowledge of East Pakistan both among Pakistanis and non-Pakistanis. No book of this type has yet been published anywhere by any private publisher. The Book Society's aim is to publish books on subjects which are neglected by those who are in business just for profit. We feel happy that it has been given to us to lead the way in this field.

N. M. KHAN,

Chairman, Pakistan Co-operative
Book Society

125, Motijhil Road, Dacca.
22-10-1955.

By the same Author:

WHY PAKISTAN
PAKISTAN PLAN
OUR QUAID-E-AZAM
MUSAFIR (Bengali)
MUHAMMAD ALI (Bengali)
IMAM AZAM (Bengali)
RECOLLECTIONS OF A VAGABOND
(Under preparation)

AUTHOR'S NOTE

It is indeed a pity that at a time when the world is becoming smaller with the improvement of speed and comfort in globe-trotting and when people are devising ways and means of space-travelling with a view to delve into the secrets of unknown universe, very few people, not only in the world outside but also in the western wing of Pakistan, know so little about East Pakistan and its people. Of course, occasional articles giving in broad outlines some of the more important aspects of life in East Pakistan appear now and then in some of the magazines and journals of Pakistan. But these articles give too sketchy a picture and too meagre details to enable an outsider to get a glimpse of life as it is lived by the forty-two million souls residing in this riverine region.

An attempt has been made in this book to present to the readers brief but full accounts of the life led by different categories of people, particularly those villagers who constitute the bulk of the population and who are the real back-bone of the country.

Special care has been taken to make the accounts as objective and as true as possible. Because my sole intention in writing the book has been to present before the world at large and West Pakistan in particular, the real life—without addition or even the faintest colouring—that one finds throbbing in this land of rains and rivers.

In this connection, I shall be failing in my duties if I do not express my heartfelt gratitude to Mr. N. M. Khan, C.S.P., Chairman of the Pakistan Co-operative Book Society, for writing a Foreword for the book. I must also thank Mr. Mizanur Rahman, Mr. Salimullah Fahmi, Mr. Khairul Kabir and Mr. Anwar Husain for giving me encouragement and rendering help and co-operation in the preparation of the book. Lastly, but not the least, my thanks are also due to Mr. Waldo S. Sommers who has very kindly gone through the manuscript. Most of the photographs published in this book were taken by Mr. W. Khan, to whom my thanks must also go.

The picture of life, as it is painted in this book, is complete as far as possible in all its details. It is now for the readers to judge and comprehend.

C. S. RAHMAN

MAYEEN MAHAL,
Kakrail Road, Ramna, Dacca,
October 20, 1955.

CONTENTS

As a token of respect and admiration
this pen-picture of

LIFE IN EAST PAKISTAN

is dedicated to

Mr. ALTAF HUSAIN,
Editor, DAWN, Karachi

C.S.R.

LIFE IN EAST PAKISTAN

A PROFILE

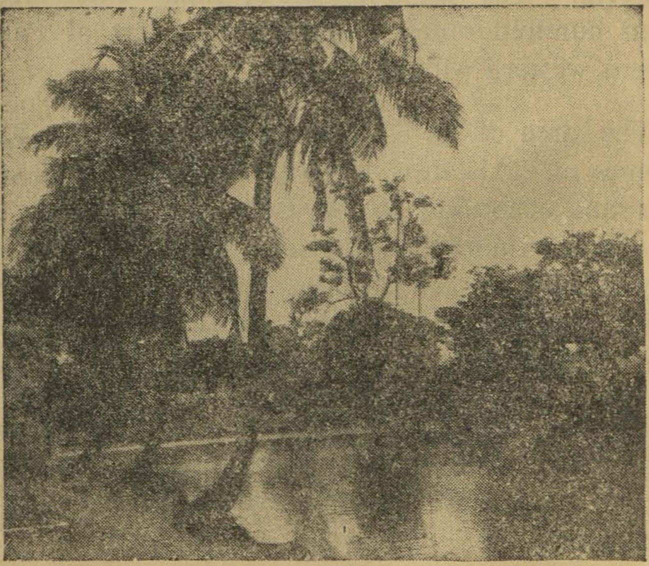
East Pakistan is the biggest provincial unit of Pakistan representing about 15 per cent. of the total area of the country and about 60 per cent. of her total population. It is one of the most thickly populated areas in the world. The vast land mass of India—extending over fifteen hundred miles—separates this part of Pakistan from its western wing.

The area of the region now forming this eastern province of Pakistan is over sixty three thousand square miles and according to the Census of 1951 it has a population of more than forty-one millions, of which over thirty-two millions are Muslims, nine millions Hindus and a few lakhs belonging to the Buddhist, Christian and other communities.

The most characteristic feature of the province is her green fields with lovely hills and forests and the network of rivers and streams which serve for irrigation as well as transport.

For administrative purposes the province has been divided into three divisions; the Dacca Division, the

Chittagong Division and the Rajshahi Division. There are 4 disricts in the Dacca Division: Dacca, Mymensingh, Faridpur and Bakarganj. In the Chittagong Division there are 5 districts, namely, Chittagong, Chittagong Hill-Tracts, Noakhali, Tippera and Sylhet; while in the Rajshahi Division there are 8 districts: Rajshahi, Pabna, Bogra, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Kushtia, Jessore and Khulna. These 17 districts are in their turn divided into many subdivisions, each subdivision having several *thanas*. *Thana* is the lowest administrative unit with a police-station in each of them. For the purpose of local self-



A quiet village scene

government every district has an elected District Board with a District School Board for the conduct of primary education. In Sylhet district there are Local Boards in every subdivision instead of a District Board. Union Board is the lowest local body having elected representatives of the people. In every *thana* there are several such Union Boards.

The capital city of the province is Dacca and other important towns are Chittagong, Comilla, Sylhet, Mymensingh, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Jessore and Khulna. The principal port is situated at Chittagong and another port has recently been developed at Chalna on the river Pasur in Khulna district. Narayanganj, Chandpur, Bhairab Bazar and Barisal are important inland ports and trade centres. The Eastern Bengal Railway system serves the whole province with its headquarters at Chittagong.

The people of the province speak Bengali, the language which has won worldwide recognition for its literary merits. Poet Tagore, the Nobel Laureate, wrote in this language. Nazrul Islam is another poet of repute whose works are also in Bengali.

The country being mainly an agricultural one, about 95 per cent. of its inhabitants depend more or less on agriculture for their livelihood. Available statistics indicate that the total area under cultivation is 26·2 million acres, of which 5·7 million acres are double or triple cropped, the net cultivated area being 20·5 million



Around a village tube-well

acres. Mainly food crops and some varieties of cash crops are produced in these fields.

Of the food crops, rice is the most important both as regards area sown and output. The total area under rice is 19 million acres, which is 72 per cent. of the total cropped area. Amongst other food crops grown, pulses, grams, oilseeds, chilies and sugarcane deserve special mention. About 195 thousand tons of

pulses, over 50 thousand tons of grams, 20 thousand tons of oilseeds, 77 thousand tons of chilies and over 3 million tons of sugarcane are estimated to be the annual output.

Among the cash crops the position of jute is above all. In fact, this Golden Fibre of East Pakistan is the greatest foreign exchange earner of Pakistan as a whole. About 75 per cent. of the world production of jute and almost cent. per cent. of its finer varieties are grown in East Pakistan. According to the latest statistics the area under jute is 1·9 million acres and the annual production is 5·5 million bales. Of the other cash crops, 41·5 million lbs. of tea, 45 thousand tons of tobacco, 22



A Sylhet tea plantation



A betel-nut orchard

thousand tons of sunn-hemp and 14 thousand bales of cotton are produced annually.

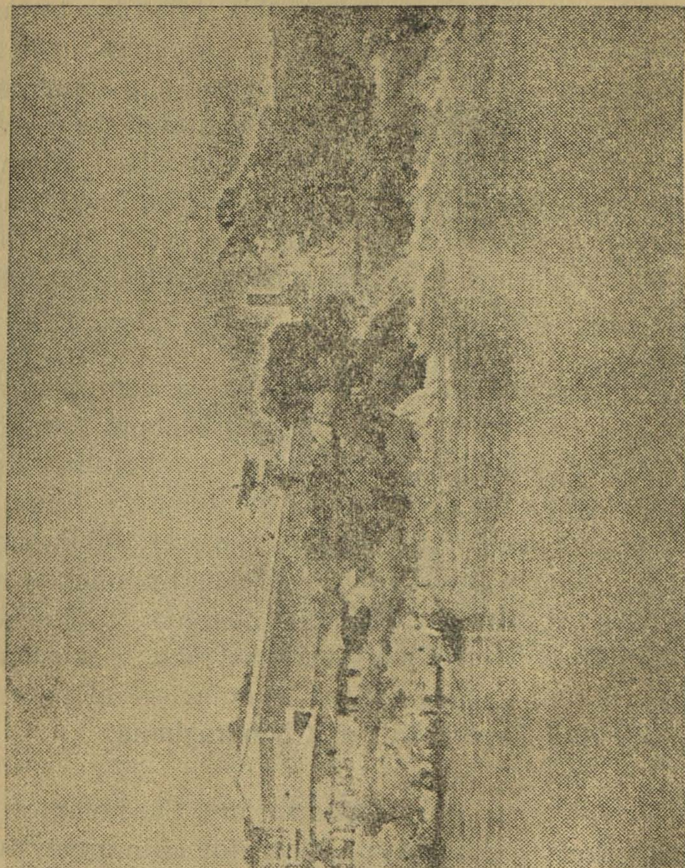
The hills of East Pakistan, which will mainly be found in Chittagong and Hill-Tracts areas, are off-shoot ridges of the Lushai Hills and have their local names, as in Chittagong it is known by the name of Chandranath Hill. There are some smaller ridges in Sylhet, Mymensingh and Tippera also.

All these hills, particularly those of Chittagong and Hill-Tracts have vast areas of natural forests in them.

But the greatest of the forests of this region lies towards the south on the Bay of Bengal which occupies the entire southern portion of Khulna district and also some parts of Bakarganj. This great forest is known as the *Sundarbans.* There are some forest areas in Sylhet, Mymensingh and Dacca districts also. The total area under forests in this part of the country is more than three million acres, which is 8·6 per cent. of the total land area of the province.

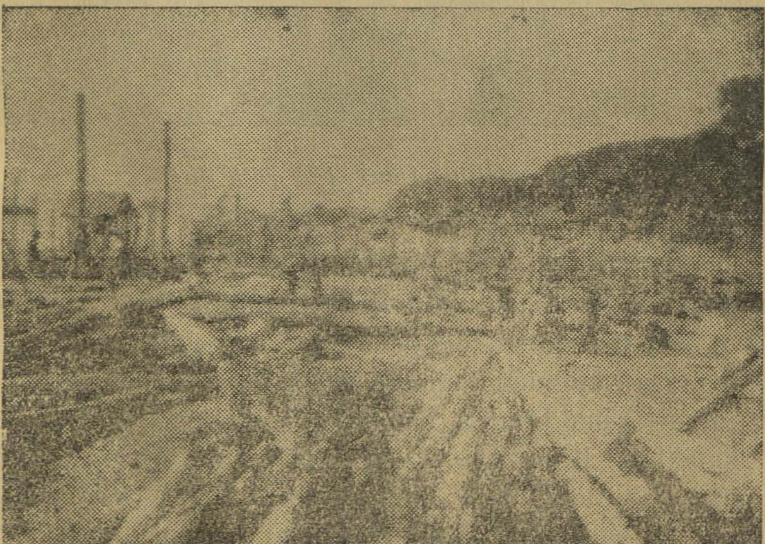
The principal products of the forests are timber and fuel wood, the annual output of which is about 14 million cubic feet. Among other forest products bamboo, cane, honey and wax may be specially mentioned. About 50 million bamboos, 150 thousand canes, over 400 thousand pounds of honey and about 80 thousand pounds of wax are produced annually. Of the bamboos produced in the forests of Chittagong and Hill-Tracts a substantial portion is now utilised for the manufacture of paper in the Karnafuli Paper Mills at Chandraghona.

The forests of East Pakistan are the home of the world-famous Royal Bengal Tiger found in great numbers in the *Sundarbans.* In the forests of Chittagong and Hill-Tracts are found herds of wild elephants also. Besides, in almost all the forests there will also be found a great number of deer of various kinds, wolf, hyena, wild boar and many more species of game animals. In the hills and forests of Chittagong area sometimes rhinoceros are also found.



A view of the Karnafuli Paper Mill

Forests of East Pakistan have in them a great potential source of wealth for the nation. So far no systematic attempt was made to tap this source properly; but for scientific exploitation of the forests preliminary arrangements have now been made and some modern machinery and equipment have been procured through foreign help. It is expected that as a result of such mechanised exploitation our national income will increase considerably and we shall be able to spend more money every year on nation-building programmes. It is also expected that in the near future some new forest industries will also come into existence.



Timber extraction in the forests of Chittagong Hill Tracts



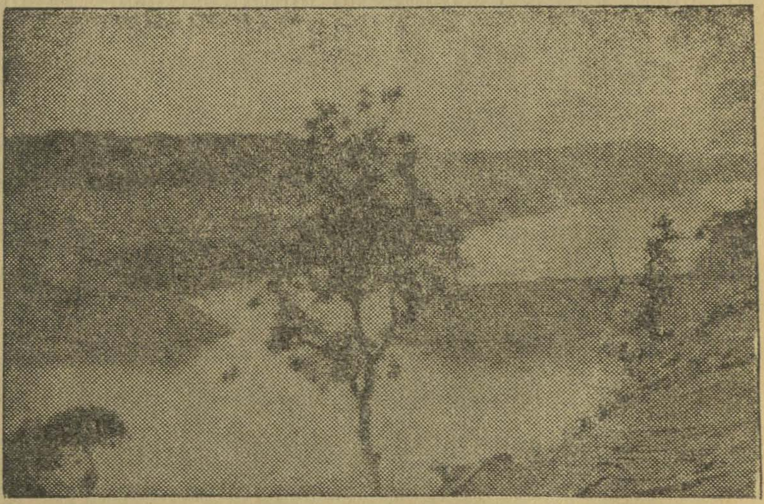
Heaps of Hilsa glitter like quick silver

Like the hills and forests, rivers are also a great source of national wealth in this part of the country. We have here great rivers like the Padma, Brahmaputra, Meghna, Madhumati and Karnafuli with hundreds of tributaries and branch rivers like Buriganga, Dhaleswari, Sitalakhya, Kaliganga, Gorai, Ichhamati, Pasur, Arial-khan, Teesta, Gumti, Titas, Surma, Barak, Mahanadi, Feni, Mayurakshi and many smaller streams and brooks all over the province. These rivers not only serve the purpose of irrigation and transportation, but also have in their waters an inexhaustible piscine wealth. In fact,

ours is a pre-eminently fish producing area and the rivers, canals, *beels* and *haors* of this region are abundantly stocked with all sorts of carps—the *Katla, Rui, Mrigal, Bawoosh*—fresh water sharks, cat-fish and innumerable other varieties of smaller fishes. The *Hilsa* of Padma, Meghna and Brahmaputra is a famous species caught in thousands of tons during the monsoon season every year. We have here tremendous possibilities for the manufacture of various kinds of fish products. According to the statistics the annual production of fresh water fish at present is over one million tons and that of sea fish about 70 thousand tons. Of this catch, the greater portion is consumed locally or processed into dried fish. About 20 thousand tons are also exported to Indian markets every year.

Though mainly an agricultural country, East Pakistan has enough raw material and man-power for the development of manufacturing. Until recent years no attempt was made to utilise local raw materials by establishing industries in the area, but instead it was made a hinterland for the supply of raw materials to the industries in and around Calcutta. Even the jute mills were established in the vicinity of Calcutta, though East Pakistan produces more than 75 per cent. of the raw jute and almost cent. per cent. of its finer varieties. Similarly, the bamboo comes from East Pakistan, but the paper mills were located in or near Calcutta.

This state of affairs cannot continue. After the establishment of Pakistan, the Government of this free country took immediate steps to industrialise the province as far as possible. The biggest jute mill of the East—the Adamjee at Narayanganj—has been established and is now in full operation. By the combined efforts of the Government and private parties some other jute mills have also been established in various parts of the province. Another notable achievement in this direction is the establishment of the Karnafuli Paper Mills at Chandraghona in Chittagong. The mill is already in production

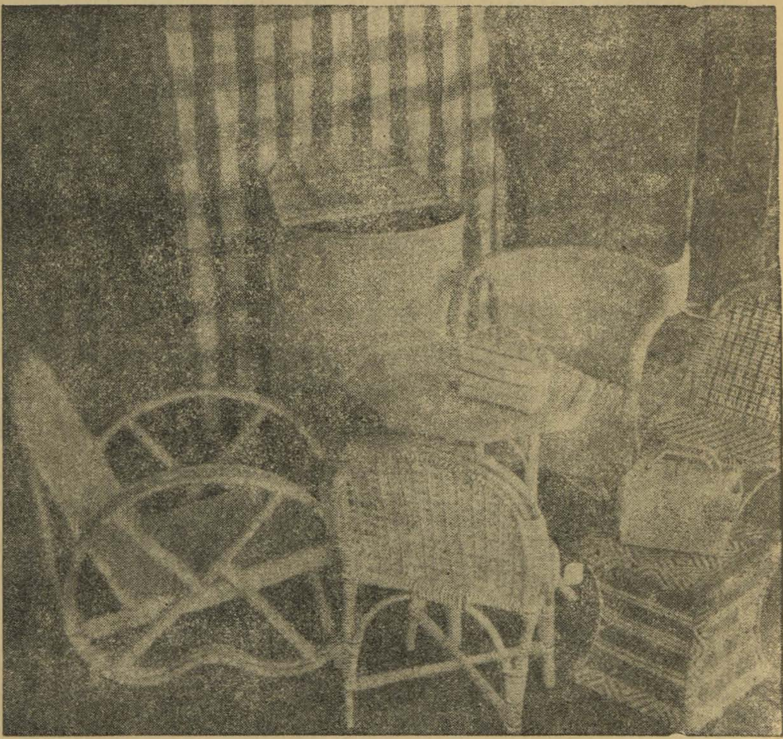


The Kaptai Dam of the Karnafuli Hydel Project

and it is hoped that very shortly it will be able to supply all the paper requirements of the country. In the field of textile manufactures, the province had several cotton mills from the pre-Pakistan days. By the help of the Government many thousands new spindles and looms have been given to the existing mills and some more mills have also been started. Of the new mills, the Muslin Cotton Mill at Kaliganj in Dacca is a notable venture. We had four sugar mills from before the achievement of independence. Recently Government have come forward to establish a bigger sugar mill at Mahimaganj in Rangpur. When this new mill starts production East Pakistan will not only be self-sufficient as regards the supply of sugar, but will also be able to export some of its produce to foreign countries.

In the sphere of other industries, East Pakistan has several match factories, glass works, hosiery factories, soap works, tanneries, one cement factory and a pencil factory. It is hoped that by the combined efforts of the Government and private parties more such factories and mills will gradually come into existence to utilise various kinds of raw materials produced here.

East Pakistan has developed some cottage industries also, among which handloom weaving, manufacture of conch-shell bangles and that of horn-combs and mother-of-pearl buttons, making of cane and bamboo furniture and bell-metal wares are noteworthy.



Some specimens of cane furniture

Availability of cheap power is a pre-requisite for widescale industrialisation of a country. From the very beginning our Government realised this and steps were taken to harness the Karnafuli and produce from its waters cheap electricity for industrial purposes. This project has progressed far and it is hoped that within a year or two production of electricity will commence and it will then be possible to supply cheap power not only to

the industrial establishments in the Chittagong area, but also to those of other localities . For the time being Government have, however, started new thermal power stations at Sidhirganj in Dacca and in Chittagong.

The progress in the field of agriculture and industry is no doubt a stabilising factor in the growth of a nation. But advancement in the field of education and learning is a thing which gives prestige and honour to a nation. The position of East Pakistan is more favourable in this regard in comparison with other provinces of the country in its western wing. According to the Census figures of 1951 the percentage of literacy in this province is more than sixteen, while in the Punjab and other western provinces the figure is much lower. But still there is much to do and during the last seven years something has really been attempted to better the position.

The most noteworthy action of recent years in this field is the establishment of Rajshahi University. We had so long only the Dacca University which acted as the seat of higher studies in all the branches of knowledge. After the establishment of the Rajshahi University northern districts will have these facilities near at hand and this will go a long way in improving the position still further.

Besides these two Universities, we have seventy colleges of different grades in this province. Among the other educational institutions there are about fifteen hundred high schools, about thirteen hundred *Madrasahs*

and more than fifteen hundred schools of other types including institutions for vocational training.

Further expansion of free and compulsory primary education is another notable achievement of recent years. We have in all about sixty thousand primary schools in the province, though all of them have not yet come under the compulsory primary education plan. Shortage of trained teachers is the main impediment on the way of further expansion of the scheme. Steps have, therefore, been taken to start some more training establishments throughout the province.

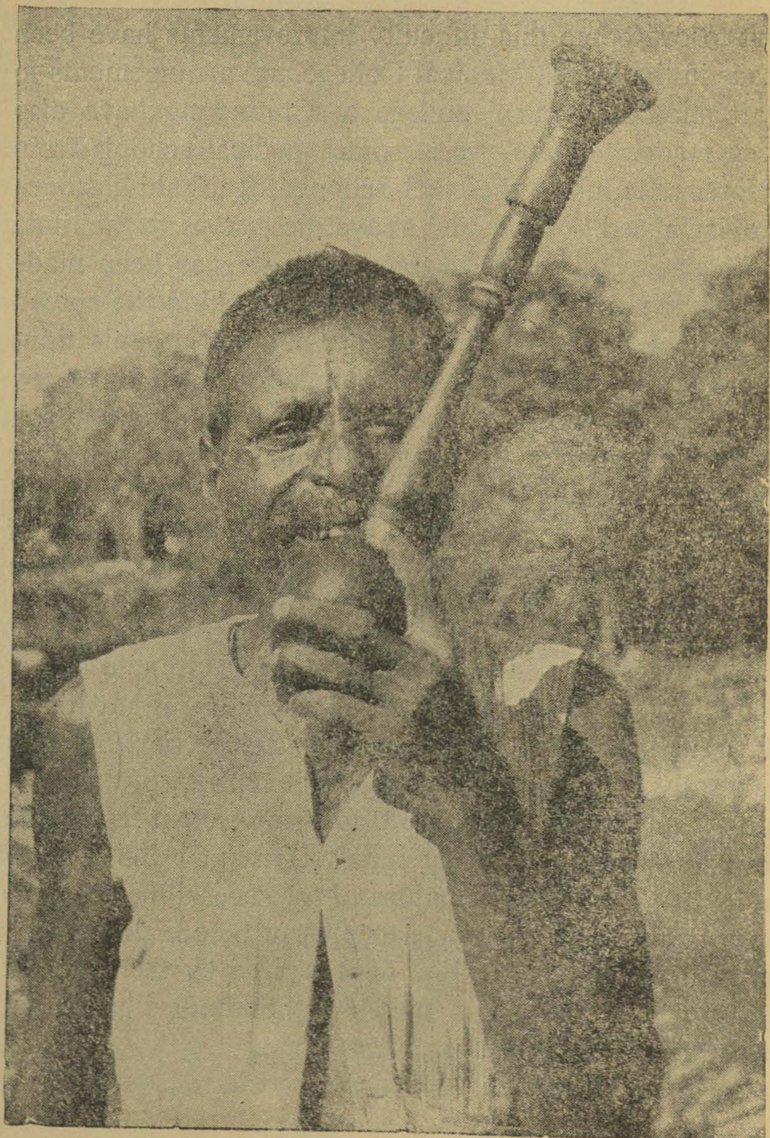
In the sphere of health and medical facilities, the greatest set-back is the paucity of qualified doctors.



Inside a hospital

But to overcome this difficulty improvements have been made in the Dacca Medical College and arrangements to start another medical college at Chittagong have also been made. There were some medical schools from beforehand and another such school at Rajshahi has been provincialised. Over and above these steps to facilitate medical education, arrangements have also been made to intensify preventive measures for checking the spread of various diseases. Help of international organisations like WHO, UNICEF, Ford Foundation, etc., has been obtained and with it extensive plans for malaria control, BCG campaign for the control of tuberculosis and other steps for checking diseases like cholera, typhoid and small-pox have been taken in hand. Indifferent parts of the province several Maternity and Child Welfare Centres have also been established through such help.

All these measures have in them the ultimate object of improving the lot of the common man who is, no doubt, the real back-bone of the nation. This common man generally lives in the villages—in the clusters of thatched huts—far from the so-called civilising influences of the towns. To know him intimately is to know the country in its real form. In the course of the succeeding chapters an attempt has been made to present before the readers an intimate picture of life, as it is lived by the different categories of people, in the sixty thousand villages that constitute East Pakistan.



A typical farmer in East Pakistan

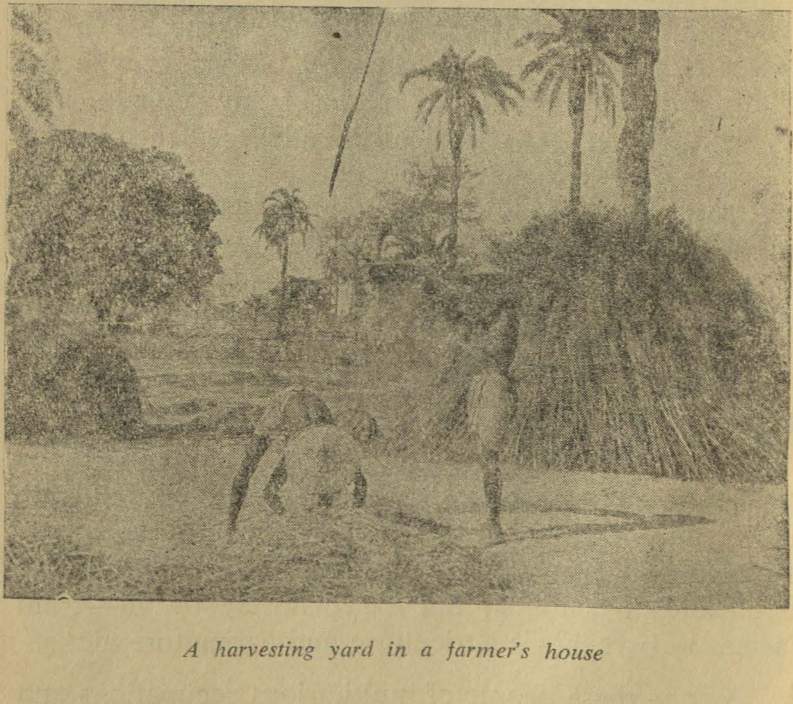
THE FARMER

East Pakistan lives in her villages. Intersected by innumerable rivers, rivulets and brooks, the whole countryside of this land of rivers is dotted with such villages—sixty thousand of them—and almost the entire population of forty million souls have their hearths and homes in these villages. In a word, the life in this part of the country is so intensely connected with the villages that one cannot conceive of any progress here without having due regard to the advancement of these villages. And, to have an intimate knowledge of the villages, one must know the people who actually live there and must also be acquainted with their ways of life, their customs and usages, their problems and difficulties, their happiness and sorrows.

Endowed by gifts of nature, which is derived mostly from rivers, East Pakistan has naturally become an agricultural country and the entire economy of the people here is, therefore, dependent on agriculture alone. The people who live in the villages, of course, belong to various groups and sections according to their occupations and avocations; but the mainstay of all—from farmer to barber—is agriculture and agriculture alone.

Among these people of multifarious occupations and callings, the farmer occupies the foremost position in

our village economy. It is he who produces the wealth—the wealth that comes from the soil. The farmer not only gives us our food, but he produces various kinds of cash-crops also, including jute—the famous golden fibre—that brings money from outside the country for expenditure on other items of our necessaries. As the producer of jute the farmer of East Pakistan occupies a very important position in our national economy. His earnings of foreign exchange due to jute amount to a big figure in dollars and sterling every year.

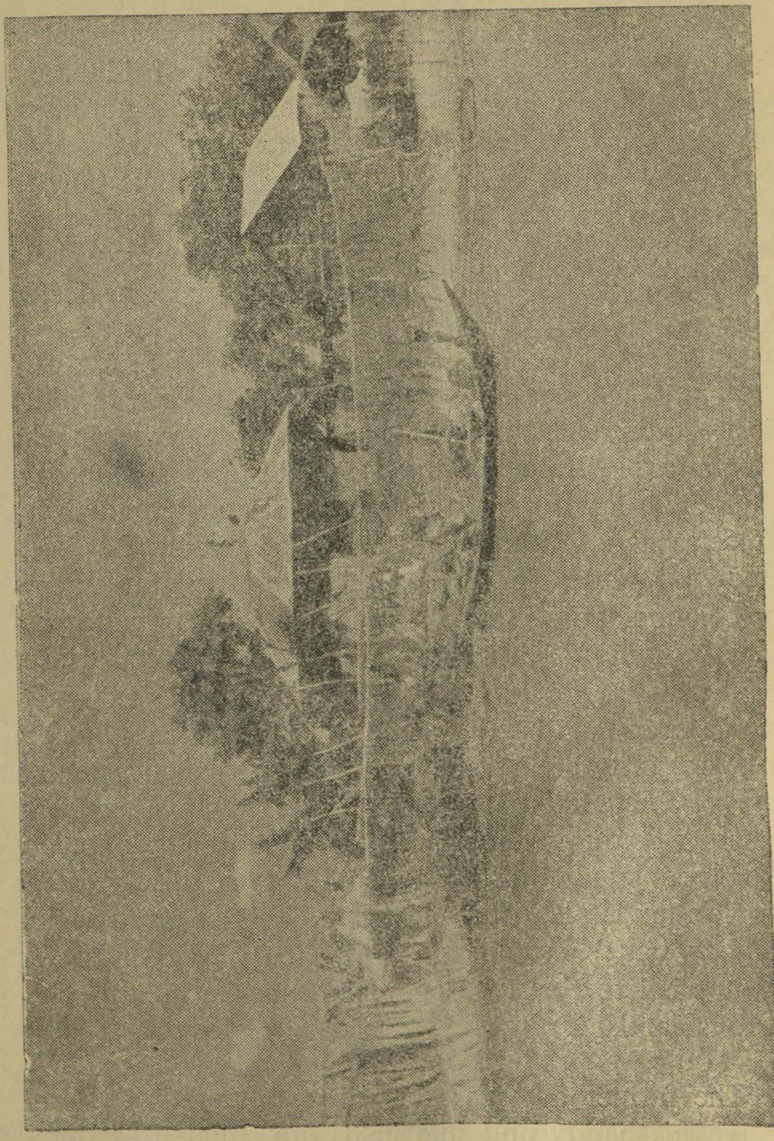


A harvesting yard in a farmer's house

The farmer has his problems. The biggest problem that at present faces him is the problem of illiteracy. As he is illiterate in most of the cases, he does not know how to introduce imporved types of agricultural implements, how to use synthetic manures and thus how to increase his yields. But time is on the move and education is gradually having its way right into the household of the farmer, where so long it was the most neglected thing.

Another problem of the East Pakistani farmer is the disintegration of his holdings due to increase in the population. Of course, there are still farmers who own a hundred acres or more of cultivable land; though by a recent enactment the highest limit of holdings has been fixed at ten acres for an individual and thirty-three acres for a joint family. This type of big farmers will generally be found in the northern regions of the province. In other parts of the country a farmer owning twenty-five acres of land is considered a well-to-do one; but the great majority of them have not more than five to ten acres. They are considered middle class farmers. Others who have less than five acres are undoubtedly poor people; but in most cases they cultivate other people's lands also in year-to-year contract on half-the-produce basis. The local terms *Bargadar* or *Bhagdar* are applied to this type of poor farmers who till other persons' lands.

The farmer has his homestead inside the village, though his paddy and jute fields are situated scattered



A farmer's house during the jute season.

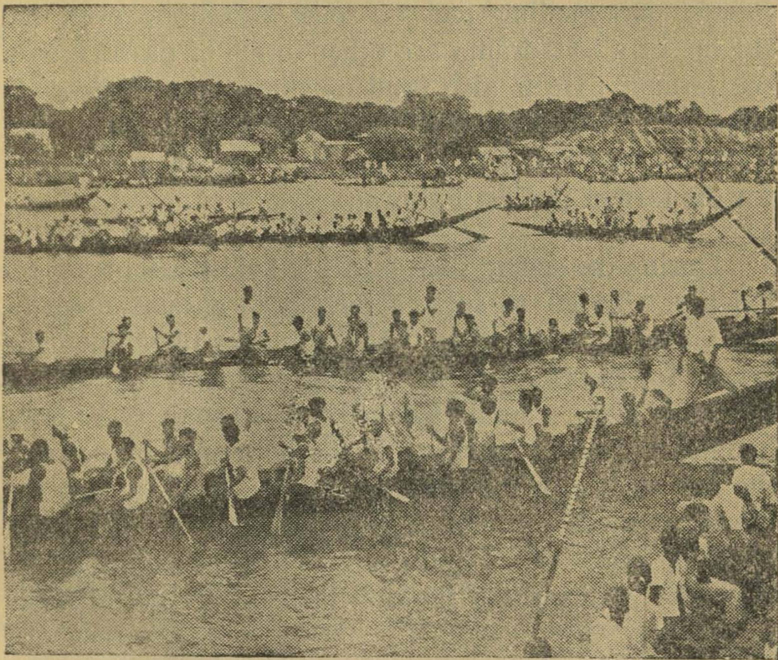
here and there in the meadow outside the village. Every farmer has some mango and jack-fruit trees, probably one or two guava and papaya trees, sometimes a tree of lichies or berries in and around his homestead. Banana trees abound in almost every homestead and there will be found bamboo groves also. In the southern districts there are also orchards for coconut and betelnut trees adjoining a farmer's house. The homestead of an average farmer of middle class status consists of four huts—probably one or two roofed with corrugated iron sheets and the rest with thatch. Of course, the cowshed and the kitchen will also be there. Poor farmers generally have not more than one thatched hut to live in and sometimes he has a kitchen and a cowshed too. But the homestead of a well-to-do farmer consists of many huts to accommodate his big family comfortably. Besides, he has a separate outer house for the guests, in addition to the inevitable cowsheds and the barn. All these houses are likely to be respectable-looking tin-sheds. A wealthy farmer has also a pond of his own. His neighbours—no matter rich or poor—have free access to such a pond; this right of access is established on usage and convention.

East Pakistani farmers belong to the majority community in ninety per cent. of the cases. But in some parts of the country there are Hindu farming classes also. In northern districts *Rajbansi* Hindus; in Faridpur, Jessore and Bakarganj the *Namasudras* and in Tippera, Mymensingh, Sylhet and some other eastern regions the *Kapali* Hindus live on agriculture and farming.

Be he a Muslim or a Hindu, the farmer's daily life moves in a uniform pattern. Very early in the morning plough on his shoulders and bullocks before him, the farmer starts for the fields. He works there till it is past noon and then returns home to have his meal. During the sowing and harvesting seasons he works throughout the day and has practically no time for rest. Threshing of paddy, winnowing and stacking of straw are generally done at night. If it is a moonlit night, it is pleasant to work; but if it is dark even then the work continues. At the time of the transplantation of paddy seedlings he



A farmer's family.



During the monsoon season boat-race amuses the farmer.

works in knee-deep mud under a very difficult condition. Retting, separation of fibres from the stem and washing are the processes in the preparation of jute that are done in water. But East Pakistan's farmer is a hardworking fellow not afraid of any difficult job.

Of course, the farmer has his off season too, when he whiles away his time in merry-making. Sometimes he sits in his verandah with his favourite stringed instrument—the *Dutara*—in hand and sings a *Bhatiali, Bhawaya, Murshidi* or *Bawool* song. Reading from a

Punthi, story-telling and on some occasions even the staging of a folk-drama are other forms of pastime with the farmer. He is also fond of games, the *Hado-dodo* being the favourite. Bull-fight, Lathi-play, Horse-race, Cart-race and Kite-flying are other forms of amusement for the farmer in East Pakistan.

During the spring time fairs are held in almost every locality. To go to such a fair is an annual event of enjoyment for the farmer. He purchases playthings and sweets for the children, and for his womenfolk probably a looking glass, a comb, a cake of cheap soap, some glass bangles and other fineries. When he returns home from the fair he is a proud man, no doubt. And, during the monsoon months the boat-race amuses him more than anything else. The Hindu farmer has special occasions of festivity during the *Pujas,* which occur several times a year.

Fishing expeditions are also notable events in the life of a village farmer in East Pakistan. During the winter season almost the whole village will form into a big fishing-party now and then and go to a *Beel* or a *Haor* to catch fish with the help of a bamboo contraption named *Polo.* In monsoon time on boats they go out for fishing with the fishing rod-and-hook or with a bamboo spear called *Koch.* Sometimes they also use small portable nets for the purpose. In all such expeditions their labours are generally amply rewarded.

In the life of a farmer in East Pakistan the women-folk have a very important role to play. The lady of

the house not only prepares food for all the members of the family, and in harvesting or sowing seasons sometimes for additional hired labourers too, but she has to attend some other difficult tasks also. Husking and



The farmer's wife at her cooking.

preparation of rice from the paddy, removal of cowdung from the cowsheds and looking after the cattle while at home are some of her exclusive duties. Above all, she has to look after her man who comes back from the fields quite tired and exhausted. She is to please him and make him happy.

She has her own time also for merry-making and enjoyment. When a big event like marrying a son or giving away in marriage a daughter comes in, not only the male members of the family are in a festive mood, the women also have a big share in such festivities. It is they who bathe the boy or the girl, paint the palms of their hands with *Mehdi* and sing the nuptial songs. Young maidens of the neighbouring houses also participate in the merry-making during such a festive occasion and all of them enjoy a real good time. The birth of a

new baby in the family also occasions merry-making among the womenfolk of a farmer's house.

When new harvest is gathered the farmer's wife prepares the *Pithas*—the home-made cakes of various description and taste—for her loved ones. Every one enjoys these sweet cakes and thus moves the wheel of time—days into months, months into years and so on.



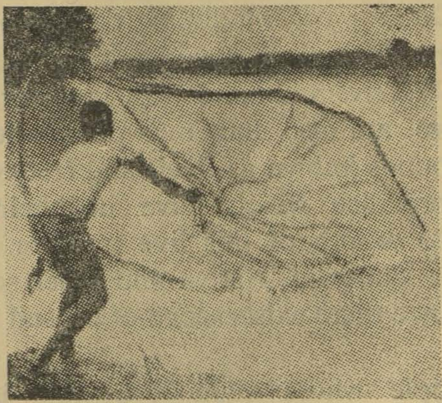
THE FISHERMAN

The land of mighty rivers like Padma, Brahmaputra, Meghna, Dhaleswari, Madhumati and Karnafuli, East Pakistan provides ample opportunities for fishing. Not only these big rivers abound with innumerable varieties of fish, there are also hundreds of smaller rivers and swampy grounds known as *Beels* and *Haors* scattered all over the province which have in their waters an inexhaustible wealth of this live treasure. Besides, at Cox's Bazar, Sandwip, Hatiya and other southern parts of the province there exists scope of coastal fishing also.

The people whose main occupation is fishing are called *Kaibarta* or *Jelay* in this part of the country. This community is such a big one that almost in every part of the province they will be found in the villages. In the life of East Pakistan their position is as important as that of a farmer. While the farmer supplies us with the starch portion of our daily diet—normally rice, the fisherman gives us the most essential protein. From the economic point of view also, the fisherman subscribes a considerable amount every year towards the finances of the province.

Most of these fishermen belong to Hindu scheduled caste communities; but in Sylhet, Dacca and some other

places there are small communities of Muslim fishermen also, who are known as *Nikaris*. Of course, these Muslim fishermen generally do not themselves catch fish, they only conduct the trade—both in fresh and dried varieties of fish.



He is throwing his net.

The Hindu fisherman—the *Kaibarta* or *Jelay*—is generally a poor man. Excepting perhaps the homestead he has no landed property in a majority of the cases and, therefore, he devotes his entire time and labour to fishing only. He cannot maintain his family unless he goes out fishing regularly and that is why he works hard with his nets and other fishing apperatus almost throughout the year. Winter months and the monsoon period are, of course, his best seasons. But



Fishing boats on the Padma

he does not sit idle during the rest of the time. He then searches the rivers and brooks and also private ponds and tanks for as much catch as he can get.

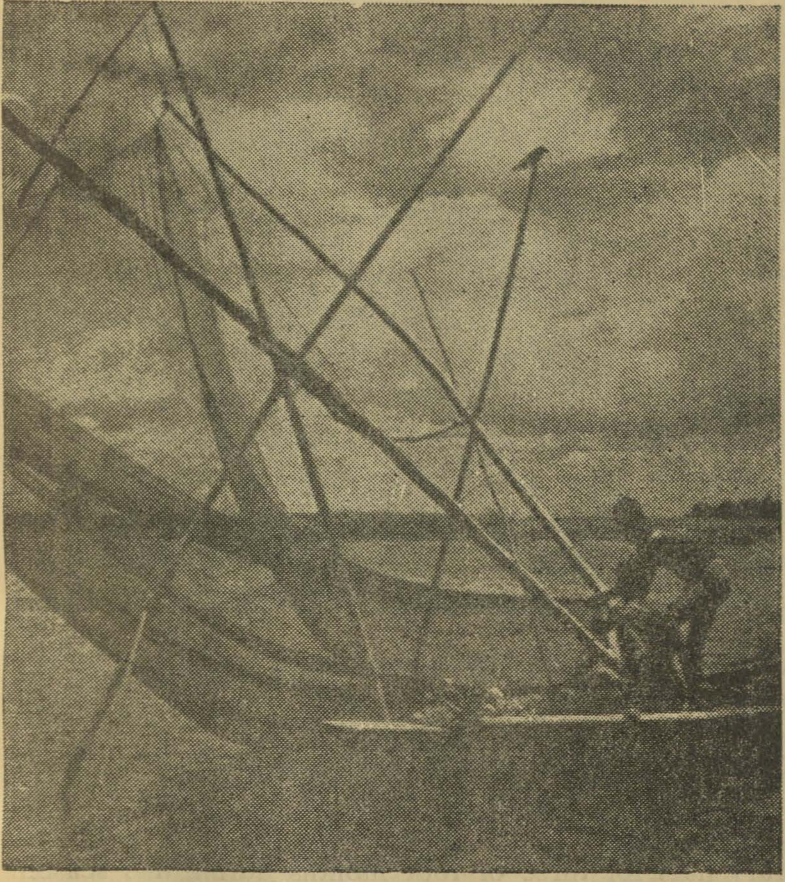
For the fisherman of Padma, Meghna and Brahmaputra the monsoon season is really a "silver period". Huge heaps of *Hilsa* caught daily during this season glitter like quick-silver on the boats and for the individual fisherman too they bring so many silver pieces every day. These rivers are also rich in all sorts of carp, fresh-water shark and other varieties of big fish. Whenever the fisherman drops his nets for these varieties, the catch is counted not in ones, twos or even in tens, but always in heaps.

During the monsoon months these big rivers, particularly the Padma, present a ferocious appearance almost every day. But the fisherman of these rivers is a brave fellow, he is not afraid of bad weather, swelling waves or even a storm. While fishing for *Hilsa* on a tiny boat—and only two persons in that boat—he leaps from wave to wave on the mighty river and is not downhearted even for a moment. Of course, accidents happen now and then, but in such an emergency neighbouring fishing boats will always be found to rush in for help and rescue.

Winter season is the best time for fishing in *Beels* and *Haors* found mostly in North Tippera, Sylhet and the eastern parts of Mymensingh. There are some *Beels*

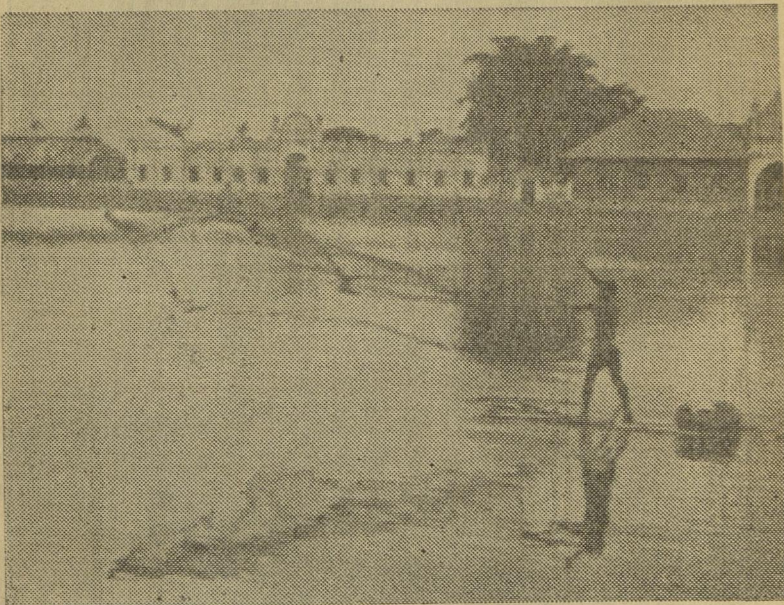


Carp fishing with a big net



Fishing for small fishes

also in Pabna, Rajshahi, Faridpur and Jessore districts. Starting from November and up to February, these *Beels* and *Haors* present a very busy spectacle. If one goes there during this period he will find a bund here, some bamboo fencing there and nets spread out all over



Fishing in a tank

the place. Men and women in scores will also be found there—some catching fish, some engaged in sorting and others probably doing work connected with the processing of dried fish. All these people live there in temporary huts for three or four months during this season. In such a *Beel* or *Haor* of average size thousands of maunds of fish of all varieties—from carp to the small fry—will generally be found. A small portion of this huge catch is sold to neighbouring *Hats* and *Bazars* for consumption fresh, but the greater portion is processed into dried fish for export and also for internal consumption later on.

The Hindu fisherman, who is now counted as belonging to the scheduled castes and was previously known as an untouchable, is a black fellow in most cases and without going into any anthropological controversy it can be asserted that he certainly comes from the non-Aryan stock. Probably that is why he is found to be a devotee of *Shiva* and *Kali*, the two non-Aryan god and goddess having Aryan sanction at a later stage. *Vaishnavism* has also some influence over him in some places.

As the fisherman spends a greater part of his day outside the house, his home life is not so well-knit as that of a farmer. Being a poor man, his homestead usually consists of two or three huts—mostly thatched ones. His greatest wealth is his fishing nets and the boat.

His likes and dislikes are identical with those of other villagers in most cases. During his off-time, which is very rare of course, he whiles away his time singing folk songs very often and on some particular occasions takes part in the mass recital of *Kirtan* songs also. In such *Kirtans* he uses as the instruments of music a drum with pointed narrow ends called the *Khole* and bell-metal discs called *Kartal,* which are used as cymbals. Sometimes he also uses an one-stringed instrument called the *Ektara.* He amuses himself during the *Pujas* and when some marriage or other festivity is in the family. During the time of a fair, which is generally held at some *Kali* temple or at other places on the

last day of the Bengali year, the fisherman generally goes there with his women-folk and enjoys life as much as he can.

Early marriage is prevalent among the Hindu fisherman class. A boy is married before he is twenty years of age and a girl is given in marriage generally at an age when she has not yet reached her puberty. The wife of a fisherman is generally a devoted woman, though she may sometimes feel that her man remains away from her for a greater part of the time. When the man goes to the *Beel* or *Haor* to work and live there for three or four months, the wife also goes with him now and then to help him in his work, particularly in the processing of dried fish.

And, on the mighty Padma, when the fisherman goes out *Hilsa* fishing, his maid-of-the-house waits for him with a throbbing heart, while watching the sky all the time to ascertain if there is any likelihood of a Nor'wester breaking loose. She prays to the god of weather for the safe return of her man, who is the main prop of the family and in whose absence her whole being would go to pieces.

THE WEAVER

In the village life of East Pakistan the weaver is another important person. While the farmer and the fisherman between them supply us with our essential food, the weaver gives us the cloth that helps to make us civilised beings. The part played by him is, therefore, a very important one.

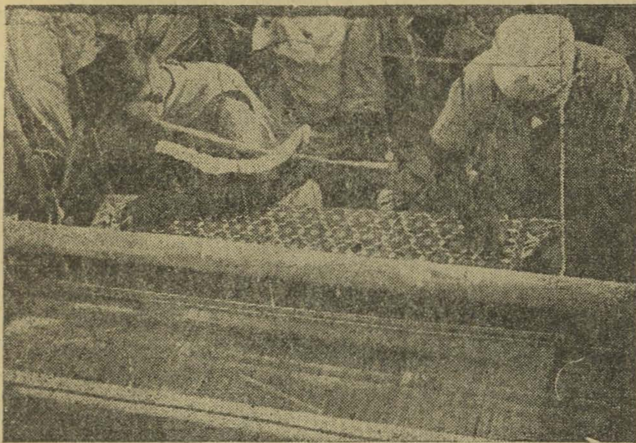
Of course, in the present set-up of things when the machine is doing the work of an artisan and, consequently, mill-made cloth has replaced the handloom variety to a great extent, the importance of a village weaver has declined somewhat now-a-days. But there was a day—and that was not very long ago—when the whole world had to recognise the merit of East Pakistan's weaver. As the producer of *Muslin*—the finest of fabrics—he had then a worldwide reputation. This *Muslin* of East Pakistan was then so much in demand in the aristocratic circles of Europe that even the bridal gown of Queen Victoria was made of this material. This historic gown is still preserved as an exhibit in the Victoria Memorial Hall in Calcutta.

But those days are gone. The machine has defeated the handloom in the race of perfection and production capacity and, consequently, the weavers of East Pakistan

have been compelled to give up—if not completely, at least to some extent—the position of importance which was once theirs.

In spite of all these disabilities, the weaver of East Pakistan still retains his supremacy over the machine-people in some varieties of cloth production, particularly in the manufacture of saris. The famous *Zamdani* of Dacca and the *Zari Sari* of Tangail (in Mymensingh district) have really no equals among the mill-made varieties. In fact, no machine can ever produce such fineries. The saris produced at Shahjadpur (in Pabna), Jessore, and Jaipara (in Dacca) are also first class things. Besides, weavers of Raipura and Baburhat in Dacca and those of Ramchandrapur in Tippera, Bagerhat in Khulna and many other places produce other varieties of handloom cloth—the *lungis,* towels, shirtings, coatings, bed-sheets and the like—which have a wide market inside the province. Some weavers of Feni subdivision in the district of Noakhali produce *Khaddar* of various kinds, including shirtings, coatings, scarfs and wrappers. Particularly during the winter season these *Khadi* products are greatly in demand throughout the province.

Among the weavers of East Pakistan there are both Hindus and Muslims. Almost in every part of the country these handloom workers belonging to both the communities will be found in different villages. The Hindu weaver is known everywhere by the common name of *Tanti* or *Jogi;* but he uses the nomenclature of *Basak* in Dacca and some other districts and that of *Nath* in other places. The common name of a Muslim weaver



They are weaving a Zamdani

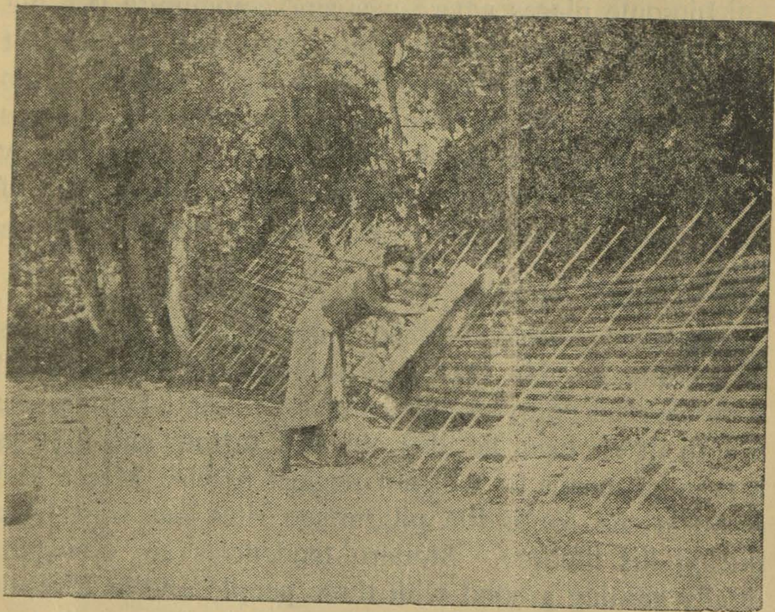
is *Julha* everywhere, though he does not like this name himself and finds pleasure in being called a *Momin* or a *Karikar*.

In most of the cases the weaver has some landed property also, and along with his work as an artisan he solves part of his food problem by a bit of farming. He can, therefore, save something from his earnings as a weaver, his inherited profession, to which he usually devotes more attention. Probably that is why it is found that as a class these weavers—both Hindus and Muslims—are not poor people. On the contrary, among them there will always be found many who can be classed as rich persons. The *Naths* of Noakhali and *Basaks* of Dacca exemplify to some extent the well-off condition of these people.

The Hindu weaver has been a distinct and separate caste from time immemorial. He has practically no social contact with an upper-class Hindu or, in other words, with a *Brahmin* or a *Kayastha*. Probably this is the reason that in most of the places these weaver people live as a compact community at a part of the village, quite separate from the society of the so-called *Bhadra-logs*.

Though there is no caste system among the Muslims, the condition of a *Julha* as a social being is no better. Of course, he is continuing in a profession which he has inherited by birth, but it cannot be a reason that only for this hereditary occupation he should be looked down upon by other classes of his co-religionists. Unfortunately the condition is so. In a mixed village where there are *Julhas* along with other Muslims, the social status which the weavers generally enjoy is not the same as enjoyed by others. However wealthy or educated a *Julha* may be, he cannot in any circumstance establish a matrimonial connection with another Muslim who is not a *Julha* like him. Now, however, with the spread of modern education among the people the position is gradually improving and, excepting perhaps matrimonial connections, in most spheres of social contact the position of a Muslim weaver is at par with others.

Be he a Hindu or a Muslim, the life and the professional pattern of a weaver are the same everywhere. In a majority of the cases a weaver owns several hand-looms. He himself and other members of his family



He is preparing threads to weave a Sari

work on these looms. He procures yarn from the nearest town and before weaving this yarn is dyed in various colours. This dyeing business is done exclusively by the women-folk. In fact, women of a weaver's household are experts in the line, most of them know the secret of making fast colours. Previously these colours were prepared from the local herbs, but now imported stuff serves the purpose. Final weaving of the cloth is done by male members of the family in most cases, though in preliminary work women have always a big share to perform.

In some places where weavers' community is a big one, they have now formed into co-operative societies of their own. These societies are doing a wonderful job in the matter of procurement of yarn for the weavers and disposal of their finished products. There are many societies of this nature throughout the province and of them some have proved to be really powerful organisations.

A Muslim weaver is generally a man of religious temperament. He regularly goes to the mosque and performs his prayers five times a day. During the month of *Ramzan* he also observes fasting and if he is a man of means he will not neglect to visit Mecca and perform the *Hajj*—the pilgrimage rites—at least once during his lifetime. Modern tendencies are now gradually gaining ground with these people and as a result a new generation of educated young men is emerging.

The family life of a Hindu weaver is like that of other villagers of his status. He sends his children to school now-a-days and there will be found here and there even a doctor or a lawyer amongst these people. He performs all the rituals of his religion and the *Puja* season is a special occasion of festivity for him. Women are generally more religious minded than their menfolk. For them there are thirteen important *Pujas* during the twelve months of the calendar year, in addition to many more minor ones. Besides, like all other Hindu women, she has to perform her daily prayers before the *Tulsi* plant. With a lamp in hand she will approach the

revered plant every evening at sunset and after placing the lamp on the raised platform where the plant has been grown, she will prostrate herself on the ground and say her prayers. This happens every day without any break. It is her firm belief that if a woman regularly says her prayers before this sacred plant, no misfortune can ever come upon her dear ones.

She really adores her husband and the children. She is confident that goddess *Tulsi* will surely protect them from every kind of misfortune or calamity that may come. With this belief at heart, she faces the hardest of days in her life—always with a smiling face.



THE POTTER

An agricultural country as it is, life in East Pakistan is generally so simple that modern amenities have no fascination here. People do not depend on outsiders for their daily necessaries of life. Food they themselves gather from the soil and the waters around them. Other essential articles that they require are mostly obtained locally from their neighbours—the artisans. The potter is such an artisan of our villages who makes the cooking-pot and the pan, the pitcher and the plate and many other varieties of earthenware, without which the household of an East Pakistani villager cannot function even for a day.

Known by the local name of *Kumar*, he is an important person in our village life. He lives among the people all over the province. As he requires fine earth and sufficient water to mould it, he has chosen as his place of residence particularly those villages which are situated on river banks. Potters' colonies have, therefore, grown up on both sides of rivers, revulets and brooks that intersect the province from one end to the other.

By religion the potter in East Pakistan is always a Hindu and socially his position is among those castes who are considered as neglected people. From time immemorial the upper-class Hindus—the *Brahmins, Vaidyas*



The Potter at his wheel

and *Kayesthas* in this part of the country—have been using the services of these people without affording any opportunity to improve their position.

Along with the hereditary profession, the potter has in most cases some landed property also for the production of food. But on the average his holdings are so small that the produce which he gathers from them is quite inadequate to meet his needs. He has, therefore, ended by becoming neither a full-fledged cultivator, nor a successful artisan.

As he is a poor man, the homestead of a potter is a mean dwelling place of thatched huts—two to four in number. In some exceptional cases, he may also be the

proud possessor of a tin-shed or two. If he has some lands also to till, a cow-shed will also be there. The burning kiln or the oven, whatever it may be called, is another notable object at the house of a potter.

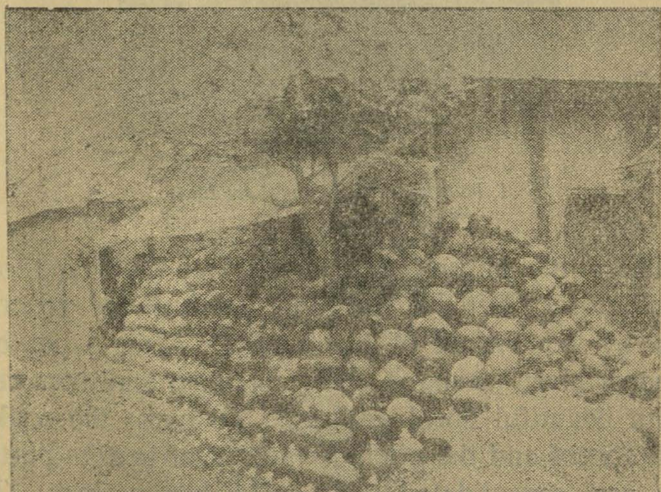
His principal raw material for the profession is the fine earth, which he gathers from the side of a river. Generally before the approach of winter season he gathers the earth and accumulates the same in heaps around his homestead for consumption throughout the year. His other raw material is the straw, which he uses as fuel for burning the potteries. This straw he gathers from his own paddy fields if he has any, or procures by purchase from the fields of neighbouring cultivators.

The most important object at a potter's house is the wonderful apparatus called 'Potter's Wheel'. When this wheel moves in a swift circular movement, it is really a sight to be seen how a lump of clay placed in the centre of the wheel takes the shape of a pot or a pitcher or anything which the potter intends to make at the magic touch of his hands. East Pakistan's potters are adept artisans in this respect, they can produce real "beauties" on their wheels. The pots and pitchers, the plates and pans and, above all, the dolls and playthings that the potter of East Pakistan makes, are really beautiful objects of art and can be compared favourably with such objects of any other country.

Though he is a poor man, the potter is not unhappy after all. He amuses himself during the *Puja* festivals, among which the worship of *Biswakarma*—the artisan's

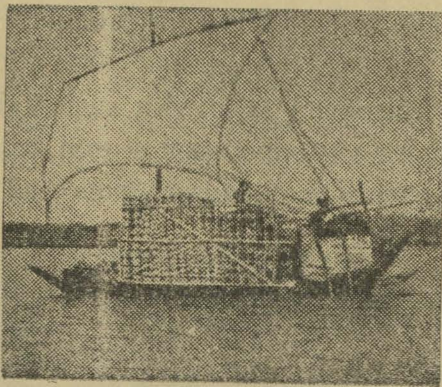
god—is specially mentionable. Sometimes he also performs the *Pujas* of goddesses *Durga* and *Kali* and also of god *Shiva*. He is a devoted Hindu no doubt, but ignorant as he is he knows nothing about the whys and hows of these festivities.

The season of fairs is his best time for earning. He goes to the fairs with loads of his products, particularly the dolls and other playthings, and earns a lot by selling them to the customers who visit such fairs in their hundreds. During the monsoon season he goes out to distant places with boat-loads of pots and pitchers of



A heap of potter's products

various sizes and shapes and usually returns home after ten or fifteen days with sufficient money as sale proceeds. And during the harvesting season, with loads of his products on his shoulder, he goes from door to door of farmers' houses and in exchange for certain measures of paddy in bulk gives his products to the housewives and thus earns more than the cash transactions could fetch.



A boat-load of potter's products

The potter himself, of course, gives the shape to his manufactures, but the finishing touches are generally given by womenfolk of his family. After a pot or a pitcher is given its shape, the women generally ornament it with beautiful floral designs. To make the cooking pot fireproof and the pitcher waterproof bottom parts of them are consolidated with mild hammerings. This process of work is done exclusively by the women. And then, the final colouring, particularly of dolls and other playthings, is also the concern of women only.

In fact, the wife of a potter is a hard-working woman. She has not only to help her man in the making of things, she is to perform many other functions too. Cooking for the whole family is her compulsory duty. If the family has some landed property she then has to perform the winnowing, husking and many more farming jobs also. She loves her children more than her own self. When any one of them gets ill, as a Hindu woman she goes to the *Kali* temple to beseech the goddess for the cure of the child. Sometimes she also performs the worship of minor gods like *Sitala*—the goddess of small-pox or *Shani,* the god Saturn. She adores her man and will do anything to please him and to make him happy. After the day's labours, when in the midst of the calm of night she meets her man, she is the happiest being, she is then the queen.

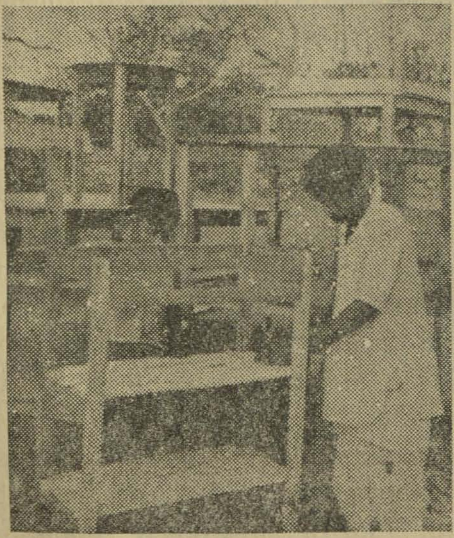


THE CARPENTER

In the village community of East Pakistan the carpenter performs a function which is not only very important, but also so essential in nature that without his services the day-to-day life of the people cannot run smoothly. The cultivators, who constitute the bulk of village population, require the services of a carpenter almost every day for keeping their agricultural implements in running order. The fisherman and the boatman likewise cannot do without the help of a carpenter who makes the boats for them. And above all, the dwelling houses that form a village are, more or less, the handiwork of a carpenter. He is the village architect who fashions houses for all his neighbours, in addition to supplying them the wooden furniture and other paraphernalia required almost everyday. In a word, the carpenter is really an indispensable person in our village life.

A carpenter is a Hindu in almost all the localities of the province, though now-a-days some Muslims have also started this profession. The common name by which a Hindu carpenter is known is *Sutar*, though the real word is *Sutradhar* in chaste Bengali. Like the cultivator, a carpenter's profession is one of the oldest. In fact, when the first civilised man left the caves and learnt the art of house-building, this profession came into being

from those remotest days. In the great Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata,* we find direct mention of this profession. *Karna,* the great hero of the *Kurukshetra* wars, was publicly known as *Suta-Putra* or the son of a carpenter, though in reality he was a pre-nuptial son of *Kunti,* the famous mother of *Pandavas.* All the war-chariots used by the fighting heroes at the *Kurukshetra* or the chariots used by the god *Krishna* and his brother *Balarama,* to which there are references in the *Mahabharata,* were undoubtedly made by the carpenters of those days.



Furniture making

Unfortunately, the present condition of East Pakistani carpenters is not at all equal to their great heritage. They are very poor almost everywhere, though here and there some families with the middle-class status

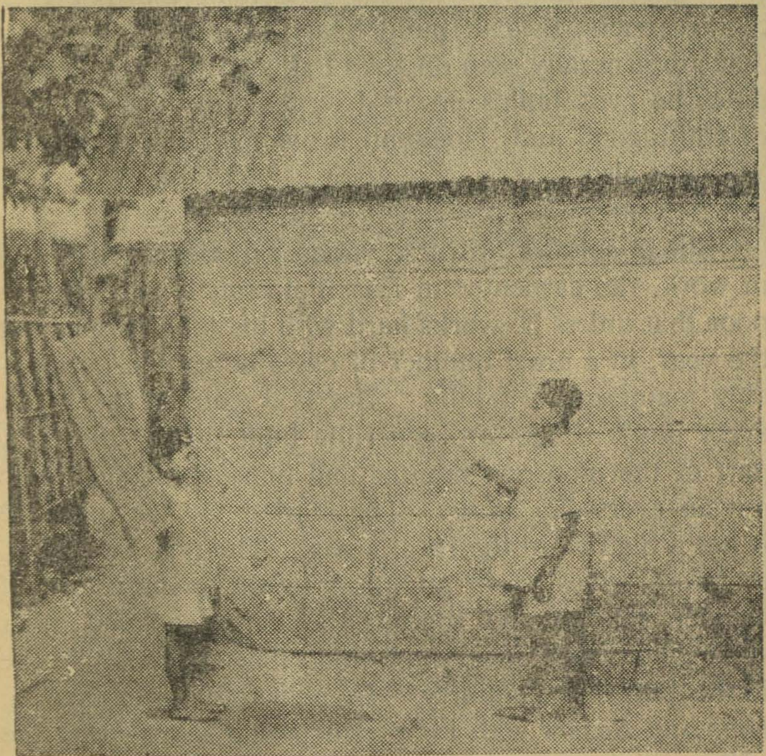
will be found. Of course, in most cases they have also some landed property and as a subsidiary occupation many do a little bit of farming too. But carpentry is their main occupation and they depend on it for their livelihood.

In almost every part of the country *Sutars* will be found residing in the villages as a compact community of their own. They have a good relationship with other villagers, particularly with the majority community—the Muslims. Their homesteads consist of thatched houses in a majority of the cases with tin-sheds here and there. Every carpenter has his separate working shed and he will always be found there busy with his tools.

The carpenter of East Pakistan is a skilled worker. He can make the finest of furniture and is an adept hand in carvings too. But in the villages he has very little scope for such fine work. His principal items of work are, therefore, agricultural implements including the inevitable plough, hoe and harrow. The indigenous husking apparatus, the *Dhenki* and its portable counterpart the *Gaeel*, are also carpenter's handicrafts. He also supplies the villagers with their bedsteads, sitting stools and sometimes with a few chairs and tables and probably an almirah or two. And then, there are the most essential *Hata* or the wooden spoon, *Shamadan* or the lampstand and the universally used *Kharam* or the wooden sandals. There is no house—rich or poor—where these wooden sandals are not in great demand.

House-building is another source of income for a village carpenter. Thatched houses, of course, can be

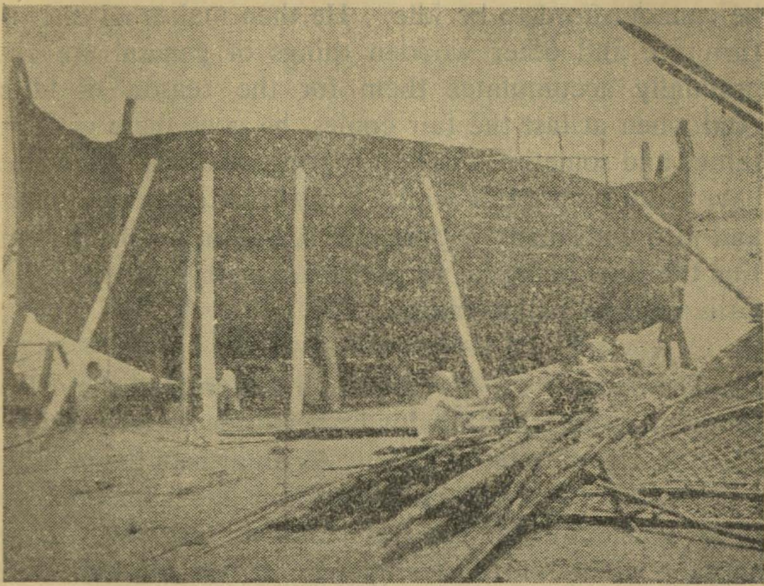
constructed without the help of a carpenter; but those houses which have corrugated iron sheets as their roofing material can only be built by a carpenter. When some one in the village decides to construct such a house, he invariably hires some carpenters to do the job. There are some carpenters in every locality who are considered to be experts in such work and their services are always in great demand.



The carpenter is the architect of such tin sheds

Another speciality of an East Pakistani carpenter is boat-building. Every year at the advent of the monsoon season he is heavily engaged in such work. He then not only renovates old boats, but also builds many new ones. When such a boat is in the process of construction, it is astonishing to see how the carpenter assembles plank after plank and thus ultimately fashions a boat strong enough to ply through any river however turbulent. From smaller craft for household use to bigger cargo-carriers, he can build boats of every description that are generally seen on East Pakistan waters. Sometimes he even builds power-driven motor launches and in Chittagong and Noakhali he constructs seaworthy *Sampans* also.

But in spite of all these varied experiences and skill in work, the carpenter in East Pakistan is generally so poor that unless he works hard with his tools throughout the year, in a great number of cases he cannot comfortably maintain his family. But how can he find work every day? Boats are generally built during the early part of the monsoon months and house-building is also not an every-day affair. The market for the furniture is not a big one in the rural areas. The poor carpenter, therefore, gives more attention to the manufacture of wooden sandals and spoons, the lampstand and other sundry household articles of wood that are widely in use in this part of the country. He goes to the neighbouring *Hats* and *Bazars* with his products and sell them to the villagers who assemble there in great numbers generally twice a week.



Boat-building is a speciality of the Sutar

In those areas where there are forests nearby, a poor carpenter will often go to the forests and after felling suitable trees make ploughs with them during the sowing season or the husking *Gaeel* during the harvest time. In the course of a day he can generally make four such things, which were previously sold at a little above a rupee each and now priced at double that amount. A carpenter who has no landed property and who finds no other means of employment, ekes out his living through this kind of adventure in the forests.

During the time when a carpenter has no particular commissioned work to do, he does not sit idle. In fact

he cannot afford to be idle. He then makes all sorts of furniture and other wooden things of general use and gradually accumulates them for the season of fairs. And when at last the fair comes, he goes there with his things and sometimes does a roaring business. He comes back from such a fair with a happy and contented mind, and also with many a purchase for family consumption. For the time being he forgets his poverty and feels that he is really a happy man.

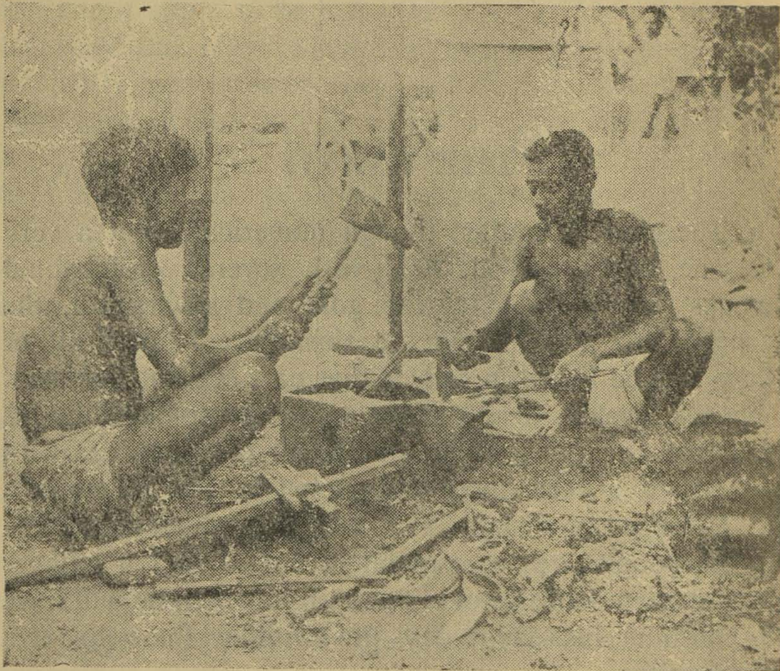
The *Sutar* is a *Vaishnava* in a majority of the cases, though like all other Hindus he performs various sorts of *Pujas* also from time to time. As an artisan the worship of *Biswakarma* is obligatory on him and sometimes he also worships the goddess *Luxmi*. *Dol* or *Holi* is another widely current religious festival for him. He is fond of *Kirtan* songs and very often whole night sessions of this particular type of devotional mass recitals are held.

A carpenter's house—whether it is a poor man's cottage or a well-to-do person's home—is very neat and tidy almost everywhere. His housewife is, of course, responsible for this. Womenfolk of a carpenter's house have generally a liking for such cleanliness. The wife of a carpenter is a devoted woman. Like all other Hindu women she also paints her forehead with vermilion and wears conch-shell bangles in the belief that her husband's span of life will thus be lengthened. Ungrudgingly she shares his worries and sorrows and her greatest desire is to die on the lap of her man.

THE SMITH

The clan of smiths, though numerically not a very big one, covers a wide field with several professional groups: the blacksmith, the gold and silversmith, the coppersmith and at last the tinsmith. Almost all of them will be found in this or that part of East Pakistan. But the blacksmith is a fellow who is conspicuous by his presence everywhere—in almost all the localities. In fact, he is a very important person in our village life. Like a potter or a carpenter the services which he renders to the people are so essential in nature that a villager cannot even conceive of a situation in which he will have to continue his day-to-day life without the help of a blacksmith.

The local term for a blacksmith in this part of the country is *Kamar,* or if you speak in chaste Bengali the word will be *Karmakar,* which means a person who does a certain work. But what is that work? Ask any villager and he will at once tell you what is that particular work that the *Kamar* does for him. The cultivator, who constitutes about ninety per cent. of the village population, cannot till his lands unless the blacksmith supplies him with iron blades for his ploughs. Similarly, for the harvesting of paddy and jute the cultivator requires his sickles and scythes, which again cannot be had unless the *Kamar* makes them for him. Then there



Kamars at work

are other essential implements, like the spade and the axe, the *Dao* and the knife, the *Bonti* and the cutlass and many more such articles of iron and steel which the blacksmith makes for the people and without which no household—rich or poor—can function properly. Sometimes the blacksmith also makes for the villager his weapons of defence—the spear and the sword or long *Dao*—which are on some occasions used as weapons of offence too, particularly when there is a fracas between two parties.

The *Kamar* is a Hindu almost everywhere, though of late a few Muslims have also come forward to try their luck in this line. But in most cases these new-comers have failed to show any initiative or tenacity of purpose, with the result that though after the achievement of Pakistan a few families of Hindu blacksmiths in the border areas have ill-advisedly crossed over to the other side of the boundary line, yet the over-all position has not undergone any appreciable change and the *Kamar* is still reigning supreme in his profession.

Like all other artisans a *Kamar* has usually some land and he has resultantly become something of a cultivator too. Probably that is why he is not a poor man in most cases and it is not rare at all to come across a well-to-do *Kamar*. As they are not poor their houses are mostly good dwellings of corrugated iron sheets. In every such house they have a separate work-shed where the forge lies.

The people who are engaged in the profession of a gold and silversmith, also belong to a separate sect of the Hindu social order and are known by the common name of *Sonar*, *Swarnakar* or *Bania*. Though not a big community, the *Sonars* live in villages scattered all over the province. Along with their hereditary profession some of them used to conduct a money-lending business also. Of course, since the enactment of the Debt Settlement Act some years ago they have practically given up this business. But as a class the *Sonars* are wealthy people still and a poor man among them will very rarely be found.

Sonars are generally "ladies' favourites". They are the makers of gold and silver ornaments—sometimes bejeweled ones also—of which every woman of this



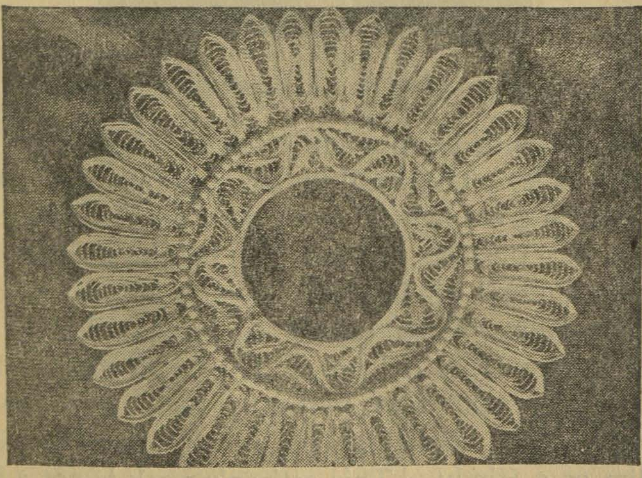
Ornament making by Sunars

country is fond. High standard of workmanship and superior skill are required for the production of such ornaments. But East Pakistan's *Sonars* are really masters in this respect. Particularly the filigree workers of Dacca have acquired wide reputation for their fine workmanship and skill.

The *Sonar* is also reputed for his extraordinary shrewdness, so much so that he has even been the butt of a proverb widely current in this part of the country: "A *Sonar* is capable of robbing gold even from the ears of

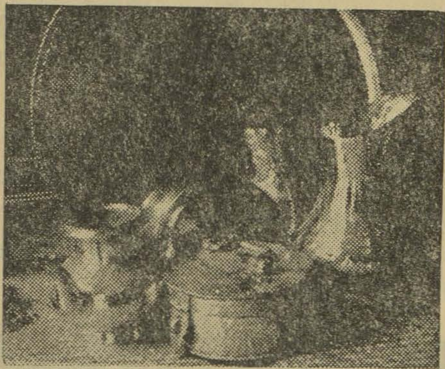
his own mother." It may be that the composer of the proverb has given a somewhat exaggarated opinion. But for the sake of truth it must also be admitted that there is really some basis for such an uncharitable remark. Everybody knows that while making ornaments a *Sonar* will not generally miss the opportunity of mixing more inferior alloy with gold than the permissible proportion and thus he will rob the people of their gold at least to some extent. But as there is no easy way of detecting such a fraud, the people quite knowingly allow the *Sonar* to go on with the trick unhampered and unchecked.

As ornaments are most important items in the make-up of a new bride, the marriage season is the busiest time for a *Sonar*. He earns a lot during such times and adds much every year to the accumulated wealth he is enjoying from past generations.



Filigree work on silver

The *Kansari* is another smith in East Pakistan, who is the maker of all sorts of copper and bell-metal wares that are widely in use, particularly among the wealthier people and the middle classes. He is also a Hindu and numerically his community is a small one, found only in some particular areas. As an artisan he has proved himself a useful and skilful worker. Like the *Sonar* he is also not poverty-stricken in most cases.



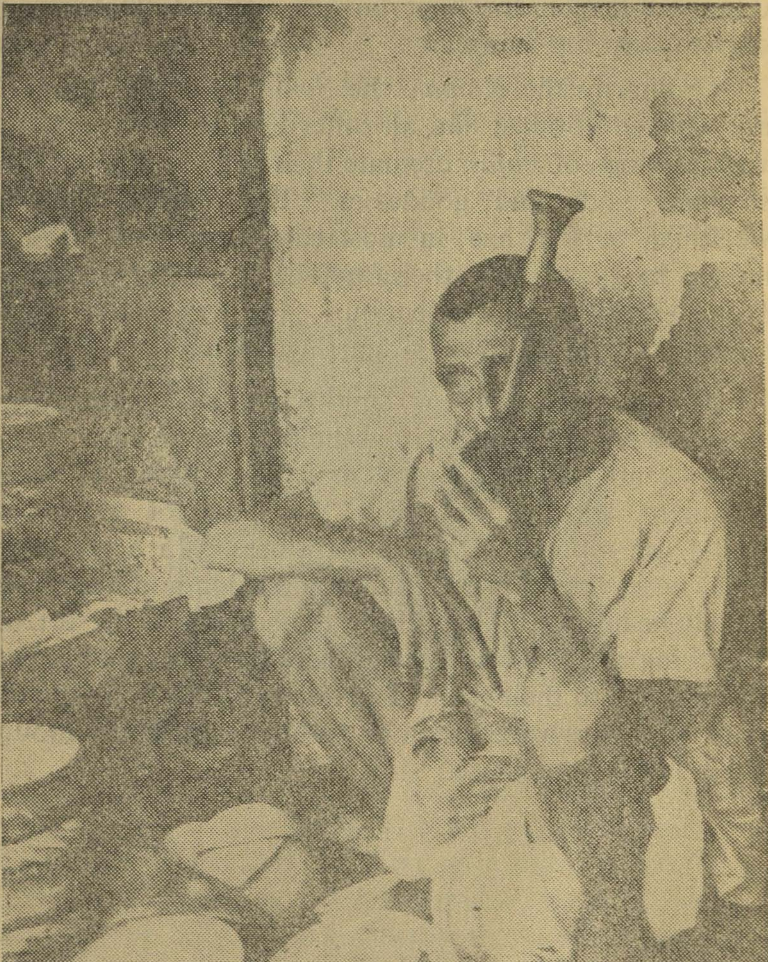
Some specimens of Kansari's work

The tinsmith is also an essential supplier to our village people. The small tin lamp, popularly known as *Kupi*, which gives light in every poor man's house, is the product of a tinsmith. Sometimes he also does the plating work on and inside copper pots, tumblers and other domestic wares which cannot be used unless plated. When he mends an old pot he has to do some welding too. The person who performs these jobs does not belong to any particular community; he may be a Muslim or a Hindu. This artisan's work is not a here-

ditary profession for him; he has adopted this calling only to earn his living.

Ordinarily the *Kamar*, the *Sonar* and the *Kansari* are devoted Hindus; like all other Hindus they perform various kinds of *Pujas*, cremate their dead and believe in so many gods and goddesses. The *Sonar*, being a wealthier person, has in most cases sufficient surplus money to spend and, therefore, he generally performs *Pujas* with pomp and splendour. He also spends much money when there comes a marriage in the family.

The womenfolk of a smith's family, particularly those belonging to the household of a *Kamar* or a *Kansari*, are generally very modest and shy in their behaviour with others. But the ladies of a *Sonar's* family are reputed for their showiness. In a majority of the cases they possess a fair complexion and have also a body-beautiful. They know the secrets of the art of beutifying one's self and have, therefore, become perfect sweet-hearts to their men. The domestic life in a *Sonar's* house is always a pleasant one and he is justifiably proud of his lady-of-the-house.



The Goala milkman selling curd

THE MILKMAN

An agricultural country as it is, East Pakistan has an evergreen charm of its own. The vast fields and medows, skirted by swift moving rivers and streams, stretch from one end to the other of this picturesque land. Ample food for not only the human population, but also cattle fodder is grown in these fields and the hedges around them. Probably that is why the domestic cattle, particularly those belonging to the bovine class, are as numerous here as the human population. Milk production is, therefore, high in this area.

What is done with this vast quantity of milk? Of course, there is no large-scale industry for scientific processing of the milk. But from time immemorial there exists here a class of people, locally known as *Goala,* continuing in the profession of milkman. These people deal with milk in bulk and also prepare all sorts of milk products as a hereditary occupation. By caste they are Hindus; but there is another class of milkmen also who are mostly Muslims. This second category of people are the suppliers of raw milk in bulk and have nothing to do with other milk products.

The *Goala* milkmen belong to a class of people who, according to the Hindu mythology, gave shelter to *krishna,* the dark complexioned god of *Mathura,* whose

love affair with the milkmaid *Radha* has become the subject matter of many a beautiful story. In East Pakistan these *Goalas* form a big community scattered all over the province. Though known as *Goalas*, generally they themselves use the nomenclature of *Ghosh* in most places. Some of these people keep milch cows, but most of them procure milk from those milkmen who only work as suppliers of raw milk. With the milk thus procured they prepare various kinds of milk products, including cream, curd, butter, *ghee* and in some cases also sweets of various types.

Of course, there is a separate class of people known as *Moira* or *Haluai* whose main occupation is sweetmeat preparation. But *Goala* milkmen also work as sweetmeat makers and some of them have actually acquired wide reputation as the confectioners of sweets like *Rasogolla* or the juicy ball, which is undoubtedly the king of sweets. It is a milk product peculiar to the area now forming East Pakistan. Nowhere else in the world, excepting probably some parts of West Bengal in India, is this class of delicacies prepared. There are several varieties of these sweets, such as the *Chamcham, Kachagolla, Pantoa* and *Sandesh* etc. There are some particular places, like Natore in Rajshahi and Tangail in Mymensingh, which have become famous as centres for the preparation of such sweets.

Curd preparation is another speciality of East Pakistani *Goala* milkmen. Locally this milk product is known as *Doi* or *Dodhi*. It is a very important item of

the menu in a feast. The success or failure of a feast depends to a large extent on the quality of the curd served. If the quality of the curd is good, the participants in the feast will praise the feast as a whole; but if the curd is not up to the mark, it is possible that everybody will consider the feast a failure. Generally feasts are held at the time of a marriage ceremony or some such social event of special importance. The *Goala* earns quite a lot at the time of such events.

Another product of *Goala* is *Ghee,* an essential ingredient for the preparation of *Polao, Qurma* and *Qalia,* the main items of food at a Muslim feast and also of *Luchi,* invariably the principal item at a Hindu feast. The *Goala* supplies *Ghee* for all such festivities throughout the country and his position is really unique in this respect.

As a class *Goalas* are not generally poor. Most of them have some land also, though they do not usually till the soil themselves, but leave it to hired labourers or to other cultivators on half-the-produce share. Those *Goalas* whose agricultural holdings are comparatively small, of course, cultivate their fields themselves, particularly when they are not wholly engaged in their hereditary profession.

But after all, a *Goala* is always a milkman and agriculture or farming is a secondary occupation for him. If he is a poor man and unable to fulfil contract for a

big feast, even then he will not sit idle or turn entirely to agriculture for his living. He will prepare curd or curd-water with his limited resources and sell the same stuff by hawking from door to door of the villagers. During the hot months such of his products, particularly the curd-water, locally known as *Ghole* or *Matha,* is in great demand throughout the countryside.

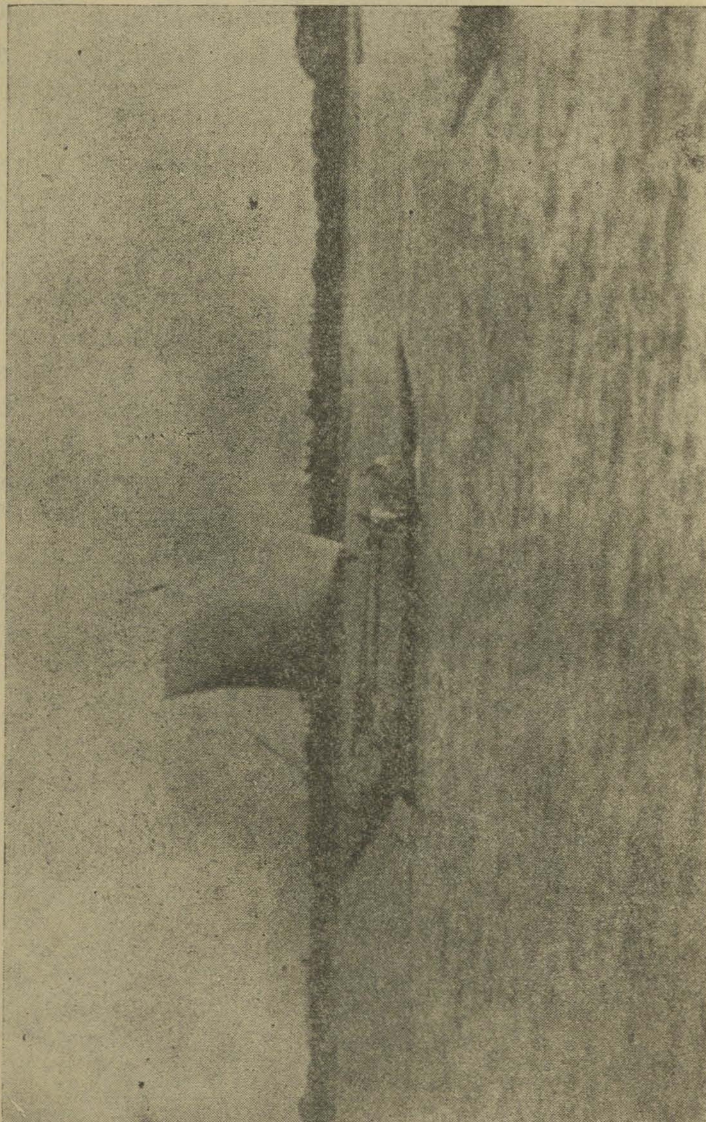
The homestead of a *Goala* is a neat and clean dwelling place in general. In religious beliefs he is a *Vaishnava* almost everywhere and, as such, very often he paints his forehead with the sandal paste. He feels proud that it was his people who gave shelter to lord *Krishna* when he was really helpless. He is a devotee of *Krishna* of course, and very fond of *Kirtan* songs, the main theme of which is the love affair of *Radha* and *Krishna.*

Among the *Goala* class a girl is given in marriage before she attains the age of puberty. The women-folk of a *Goala* are generally very modest and shy. Though they are beautiful in most cases, they have very little of *Radha* in them now-a-days. A flirt or lovesick courtesan will very seldom be found. On the contrary, a woman of strong morale and a devoted wife and mother is their ideal, which every one of them tries to emulate.

The Muslim milkman or the supplier of raw milk in bulk, is a person who generally comes from the poor agricultural class or from among the landless people Supplying milk is his mainstay and he depends mostly on this profession. Generally he keeps several milch

cows and supplies milk to the consumers among his neighbours and also to *Goalas* for the preparation of other milk products. As he is a man of religious temperament he believes that adulteration of milk by mixing water in it is the greatest of sins. He lives up to this principle in most cases, though there may be a 'black sheep' here and there.

As he is a poor man, he generally lives in a thatched hut. He knows that cows are his greatest wealth and probably that is why he loves them most. He devotes his whole attention to their care and upkeep. He is the most unhappy man when anything happens to any one of these animals. He prays always for the safety of his livestock and he believes that through the mercy of *Allah* these animals are providing him with a regular and comfortable living. He is grateful for this mercy of *Allah*.



While the boat moves on her 'wings' the Majhi sings his Bhatiali

THE BOATMAN

The proverbial land of rivers—East Pakistan—is also the land of boats. During the monsoon season the major portion of this deltaic region goes under water and entire communication system becomes dependent on boats and other rivercraft alone. The people then cannot move from one place to another without the help of a boat and for the transport of goods also they depend on boats only. The boat has, thus, become an essential feature in the social and economic life of the people here. The workers who man these boats are known by the common name of *Majhi,* which means a boatman. In the life of East Pakistan the part which these people play is really a very important one.

Excepting the *Patnis* there is no other class in this part of the country which carries on the profession of a boatman as a hereditary occupation. *Patnis* are Hindus and they have been carrying on in this profession since long past. In fact, they are such an ancient people that even in the Hindu epics and *Puranas* their services have been mentioned.

But by the passing of time, this important community has gradually dwindled to a small group of people scattered all over the province. Nowhere in the province will they now be found in sufficient numbers to

form into a separate community of their own. Here and there in some villages are a few families of them—mostly very poor indeed. Of course, these people are continuing in their ancestral profession even now, but their sphere of activities has narrowed down considerably and excepting probably in ferry services on some rivers, the *Patni* boatman will not be found anywhere else.

The place which was once the monopoly of the *Patnis* has now been occupied by other classes of people—both Hindus and Muslims. Among the Hindus the *Kaibartas, Namasudras* and *Kapalis* are doing the job of boatmen in most places. Besides, poor Muslims from the agriculturist class have also come forward in large numbers to do this job.

There are various kinds of boats in East Pakistan and the people who run these boats may also be classified into several categories according to the nature of their work. Those big cargo-boats which carry goods from one marketing centre to another are generally owned by mercantile firms or big businessmen. The boatmen who work on these boats are, in most cases, in temporary employ of such firms or businessmen. They are generally paid monthly salaries during the period they actually work on these boats.

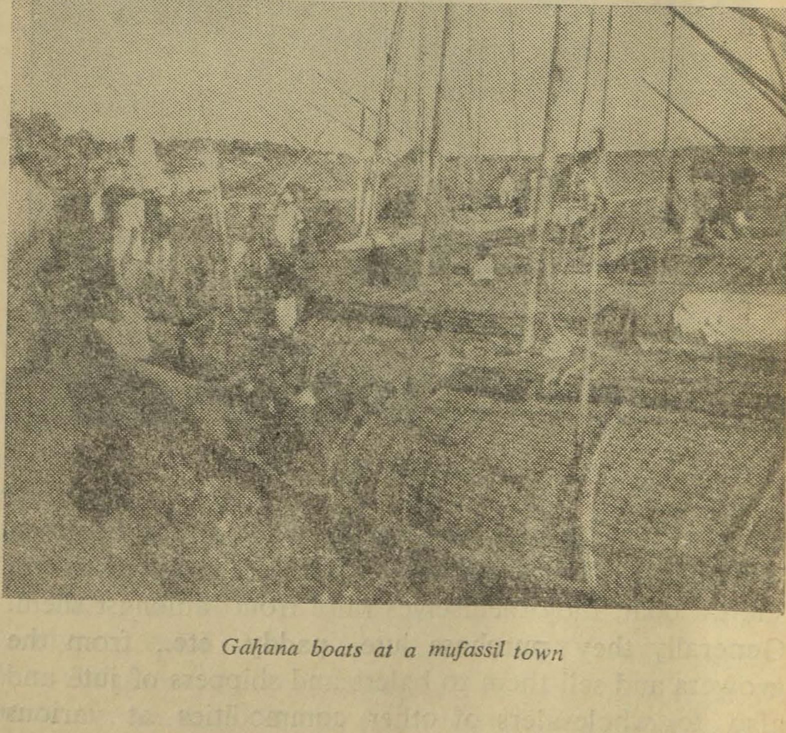
There are also small cargo-boats which carry jute, paddy, coconut and other agricultural commodities from the growers' places to business centres. This type of boats are generally run by small traders known as *Beparis*. In such a cargo-boat generally seven or eight persons



A cargo boat on sail

work as a team and they do the work of the boatmen themselves. The small capital which is required to run such a boat, they themselves raise from amongst them. Generally they purchase jute, paddy etc., from the growers and sell them to balers and shippers of jute and also to wholesalers of other commodities at various centres of business.

Then, there are big passenger boats known as *Gahanas.* This class of boats carry passengers from a fixed point to another and during the monsoon months they handle an over-crowded traffic almost every day. Generally eight to ten boatmen work on such a boat. In some cases all of them jointly own the boat and so they divide their day's earnings equally. But in some particular cases only the head *Majhi,* who is perhaps a little bit well-off, is the owner and all the rest are hired



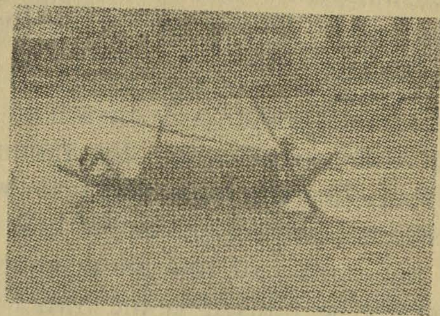
Gahana boats at a mufassil town

labourers on daily wages basis. After a day's work everybody returns home at night with some purchases for family consumption. The next morning they again start with the boat. This is their daily routine during the whole of the monsoon season.

But the "real" boatman on whom poets have written much and around whom the famous folk song of East Pakistan—the *Bhatiali*—has been woven, is the *Majhi* who steers a smaller passenger boat through the rivers, *beels* and canals of this picturesque land of his birth. Generally he himself is the owner of the small boat. In a greater number of cases he works alone, but on occasions he may have an assistant too—probably a younger brother or a son.

Every year at the approach of the monsoon season he renovates his boat and then goes out to some distant place—sometimes even unknown ones—where such boats might be in great demand. Usually the boatman chooses as his regular anchorage a *bazar* or some such important place. He carries as his passengers mostly the village folk of the neighbourhood, particularly the women, for whom the monsoon season is the happiest of times; because it is then that they pay annual visits to their relations at distant villages. Every married woman hankers throughout the year for the house of her father where her happiest days of childhood were passed. She does not miss the opportunity of annual visit to that cherished house. If the old father and mother or any one of them was still alive, her joy knows no bounds; but if these dear old ones were no more, even then the

brother will be there to receive the sister with an affectionate warmth of heart.



The Majhi steers his small passenger boat

The *Majhi* is happy that his boat acts as the medium for satisfying the cravings of such broken hearts for their dear ones. The *Bhatiali* song, which portrays pathos and sorrow, has probably originated from such cravings of village maidens

With his boat the *Majhi*, of course, helps many to be re-united with their dear ones, but he himself suffer much in this direction. Almost throughout the entire period of monsoon he remains separated from his own people. Very deeply he feels for them and sometimes in the dead of night, when alone on the boat, he expresses such feelings through the pathos of a *Bhatiali*, *Bhawaya* or even a *Baromashi*. Probably he feels tired and on some occasions sings out in a pathetic wailing:

"Oh, the boatman of my mind,
Take back your oar,
I cannot row any more."

And at home in a mean cottage of a far-off village his wife and children cannot forget him for a moment. Poor as they are, they know that at some far-off distant place the *Majhi* is sweating only for their sake. They pray to God for his safety, wait for him in eager expectations and in the hope that he will come back with much money and many a present, which will really make them happy and contented.

The *Majhi* of East Pakistan is a brave fellow. On occasions he has to perform very difficult voyages through the swelling rivers amidst stormy weather. Whether a Muslim or a Hindu, he is always a devotee of *Pir Badar,* the protecting saint of the rivers. He believes that however bad the weather may be, the saint will protect him from all the perils and he has nothing to fear. Protected by such a belief, he steers his boat through the unfathomable Meghna, the roaring Brahmaputra and the furious Padma without any care or anxiety whatsoever. He has a smiling face for all and everybody.

THE BARBER

Simplicity is the key-note of village life in East Pakistan. The vast multitude who inhabit our villages are unassuming not only in their behaviour and manners, but also in their dress and mien. They do not much care whether a person is fashionably dressed or if he has a good hair-do. These outward shows matter very little and will not unduly influence them. But still like the farmer and all his neighbours, the barber is also there with his function to perform.

There are two kinds of barbers in East Pakistan: the Hindu barber who is known as a *Napit or Sil* and the Muslim barber called the *Hajjam* or *Gunin*. Hair dressing and shaving are generally done by Hindu *Napits* and very seldom by the Muslim *Hajjam*. Due to financial stringencies some of the *Hajjams* have of late come forward to run small hair-dressing establishments in some rural towns and *bazars;* but these are exceptions. In most places Hindu *Napits* are continuing in this occupation, which for generations they have inherited as a calling and in which they are, therefore, considered to be real experts.

But however experienced he may be, in most places the barber's profession is not the main occupation for a

Napit. He has gradually accumulated some landed property in most cases and become something of a farmer too. The same thing has happened in the case of a *Hajjam* and now his actual position has become that of a tiller of the soil more than of a professional *Hajjam.* Yet both the *Napit* and the *Hajjam* have their special professional duties.



The Napit practising at a bazar

Previously it was the custom that a *Napit* was directly connected with some aristocratic family of a village or a group of other such families. He used to perform all hair-dressing and shaving of such a family or families, being given in most cases towards the payment for such services some heritable landed property on a service tenure system. This arrangement continued from generation to generation and where aristocratic families are

concerned is still found. In other cases, *Napits* used to be paid in kind during the harvest season, when a fixed measure of paddy was collected by them from every house-holder with whom they were connected for service.

Of course, the old order is changing gradually and in place of permanent service tenure or annual payments in kind, the system of cash payments is gaining ground. If one goes to a village *bazar* or *Hat* he will now invariably find some *Napits* doing a good practice on cash payments from the villagers who assemble there regularly for marketing. Sometimes the *Napit* also does some work at home when the villagers visit his residence for a hair-cut or a simple shave. Of course, in our villages shaving is always a rare necessity. Most of the residents, particularly the Muslims, prefer a flowing beard to a clean-shaven face.

The *Napit* has an important and exclusive duty in the first shaving of the head of a new-born baby. The shaving ceremony is generally held on the seventh day after the birth of the baby. The *Napit,* who is invited to attend the function, after shaving the head of the baby will accept as his remuneration a bowlful of rice and pulses and also a cash amount which may either be five and a quarter anna, or rupee one and annas four, or even up to rupees five according to the social status of the parents of the child. The hair will be weighed in gold or silver and the same will also be given to the *Napit.* If the child is of a wealthy family the *Napit* earns much on this occasion.



A Barber's shop at a mufassil town

Marriage ceremonies are also special occasions when a *Napit* generally gets some extra amount. It is the prevalent custom in the countryside that until the groom pays something to the *Napit* of the bride's family the actual matrimonial rites cannot be held. The groom has, therefore, no other way but to pay the *Napit* his dues, which is generally not below a rupee even in a poor man's marriage. In a wealthy and aristocratic family the

amount may rise to rupees twenty five or more. In some places a *Dhoti* or some other clothing is also given to the *Napit,* who is generally in a happy frame of mind when such a function comes in.

As most of the *Napits* are farmers also, they are not very poor. As a class they are intelligent people and probably that is why a widely current proverb has branded them to be the most cunning fellows. Perhaps such a notion has originated from a particular incident; for, in their day-to-day life they do not in the least give any proof for the justification of such a bad name. On the contrary, they are found to be sociable beings of pleasing temperament.

Hajjam, the Muslim barber, though not a hair-dresser any more, has a particular job. He is the circumciser of all the Muslim boys. The simple village folk consider this work to be belonging to 'secret' art and probably that is why the epithet of *Gunin* has been given to the *Hajjam,* which means a person who knows the secret art. According to Islamic injunctions circumcision is an obligatory ritual for every boy. The Muslims of East Pakistan being more religious minded than those of any other country, consider it an essential duty to have their boys circumcised as early as possible. According to their understanding, a boy becomes a full-scale Muslim only after he is circumcised. Perhaps that is why the act of circumcision is known among the villagers as *Musalmani,* though the actual word should be *Khatna.*

Generally an East Pakistani boy is circumcised at an age between five and ten years. The village people give

so much importance to this function that it has taken the shape of a ceremonial occasion almost everywhere. If the boy to be circumcised belongs to a wealthy family, probably a feast will be arranged to which all the relations and neighbours will be invited. The *Hajjam* will perform his function in the presence of the guests and as he is an expert hand he will generally do the work very neatly and to everybody's satisfaction. He will then wash his hands and the knife in a bowl of water provided particularly for the purpose. All the invited guests will approach the bowl and each one of them will drop a coin in the water, the amount varying from a pice to a rupee according to the status of the family and also of the guests. The *Hajjam* will thus get a substantial amount on every such occasion, in addition to his regular fees which will, of course, be paid by the parents of the boy.

Though a Muslim, the *Hajjam* is generally looked down upon by his other co-religionists. His social contacts, particularly in the matter of matrimonial alliances, are, therefore, confined to his own community. He is conscious of this ostracism and probably that is why he prefers a social life quite apart from the others.

The *Napit* and *Hajjam,* each being more of a farmer than a professional, generally enjoy a well-knit home life. With their family they share their pleasures and delights, their worries and sorrows. They have always before them the prospect of a better day, which gives them courage and strength to endure any hardship or difficulty that may come.

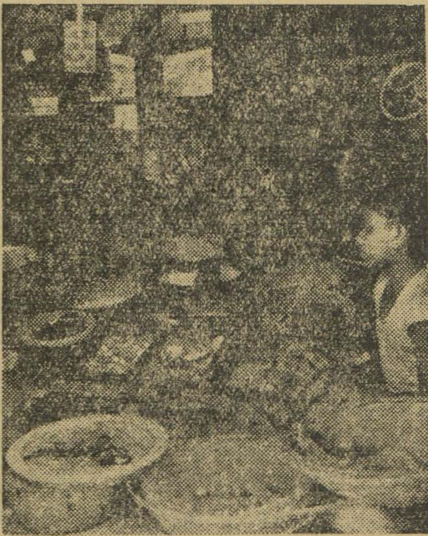
THE GROCER

Every village in East Pakistan has its grocery shop. In bigger villages there may be two or more. The man who runs such a shop is called a *Modi.* He occupies a very important position in our village society.

The *Modi* does not belong to any particular community; he may be a Muslim or a Hindu. As the profession is not a hereditary one, any villager who might be somewhat business-minded can start such a shop. In those villages where the inhabitants are mostly Muslims, probably the grocer is also one of them. In the same way, in a Hindu village he will invariably be one of the residents and in a mixed village he may come from either of the communities.

The village people of East Pakistan generally procure their supply of necessary articles from the *Hats* which are held in most places twice a week. Every householder will visit such a *Hat* and procure at least a week's supply of things for family consumption. But exactly one week's requirements cannot always be met from such supplies and often emergencies also arise. In such cases the *Modi* is the villager's last resort. Of course, the *Modi* cannot supply everything "from a needle to a motor car"; but he has stocks of almost all items of

articles that a villager generally requires, including needle and thread. Match-boxes and the *Bidi* a villager needs almost always. The *Modi* has these things. Smoking tobacco is the villager's luxury. The *Modi* can



A village grocer's shop

always supply it with molasses, which is an essential ingredient for the preparation of smoking tobacco. The chili, onion, ginger, garlic, turmeric, salt, mustard, gram, pulses, *ghee*, spices and other essentials for preparing food can also be had from him. He can also supply kerosene oil, washing soap, soda ash, some varieties of cheap toilet soap, and even rubber balloons or other cheap playthings for the children. Betel-nuts and leaves, lime and catecho—these luxury things for the women-

folk can also be had from the *Modi*. He can also supply cheap biscuits and *Muri*—puffed rice—and its sweetened variety the *Murki* for a villager's breakfast. In a word, the *Modi* is a person who supplies the villagers with almost every item of their daily necessaries at the time of real need, and when a villager has no opportunity of procuring the required things from any other place.

The *Modi* is the villagers' friend in other respects too. Often he supplies the things on credit and sometimes in exchange for rice, jute or other agricultural produce instead of cash payments. As ready-money is not always easily available, particularly for the poor man in the villages, this barter system of supply is really very helpful to many a villager.

In addition to conducting the business at home, the *Modi* also goes to the neighbouring *Hats* very often and does a little bit of business there too, along with the procurement of small stocks of perishable commodities like the betel leaves, potatoes, onions, etc., for sale at home.

Small trader that he is, the *Modi* comes from that section of the village people having very little landed property and, therefore, unable to depend on agriculture alone. Generally he starts this business as an alternative means of livelihood and his starting capital is probably not more than rupees twenty or twenty-five in most cases. But through hard labour and tenacity of purpose he gradually steers ahead and instances are not rare where within a few years such a *Modi* has made a little fortune

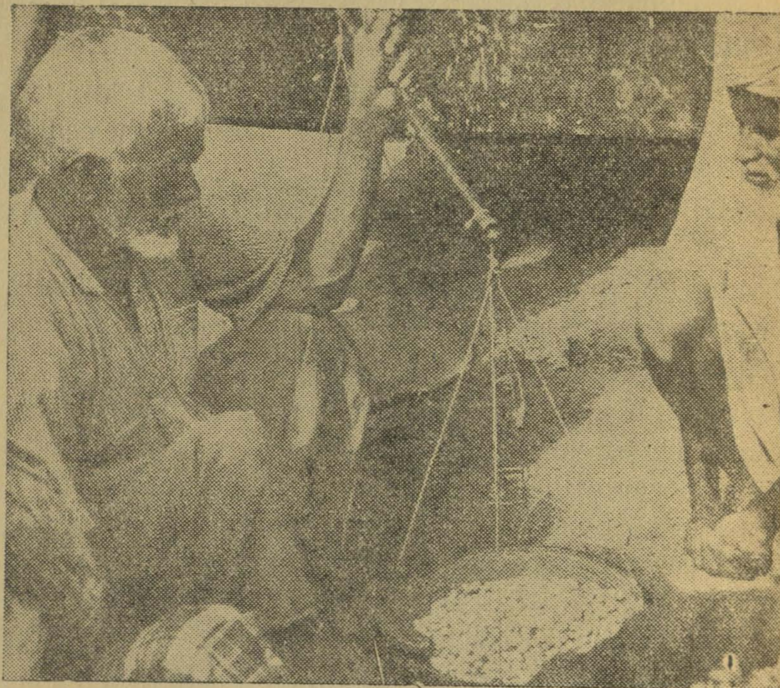
so as to buy some more land or to construct a real home to live in.

There are two other types of grocers in East Pakistan who have practically no shop to run. They are the pedlar and the man who supplies mustard oil. The pedlar grocer hawks essential varieties of articles from door to door. Previously this class of people were mostly Hindus of *Teli* caste, but their number has gradually decreased and now one comes across them very seldom and in particular areas only.

The man who supplies cooking oil to the villagers can better be called an oilman than a grocer. Locally he is known by the name of *Kolu*. In most cases he is a Muslim. He has an indigenous wooden mill for crushing mustard by means of ox or horse power. Absolute purity of the stuff is his speciality and there is great demand among the villagers for it.

A Muslim grocer is almost always a man of religious temperament. He says his prayers regularly and is a strong believer in the mercy of *Allah*. He is grateful that in the conduct of his business *Allah* helps him always and gradually he has been able to better his position.

The Hindu grocer, particularly the *Teli*, is an extremely miserly fellow. He is always on the look out for opportunities to make a rupee out of a pice. He is a *Vaishnava* in a majority of the cases and participates very often in the mass recitals of *Kirtans*. *Holi* or *Dol* is his favourite religious festival. Sometimes he takes part in other *Pujas* also.



The Modi weighs his goods

The wife of a grocer—whether she is a Muslim or a Hindu—is generally a worldly woman. When her husband is away from home on some errand, she herself conducts the business of the shop. Sometimes a minor son also helps her. She knows well how to make double profit by charging higher prices and also by giving short weights. In spite of such a trait of character she is, however, a pleasant being after all. Among the women of the village she is a welcome person everywhere and she

is proud that while her husband is a very important person in the village society, she herself is no lesser an individual.



THE MEDICAL PRACTITIONER

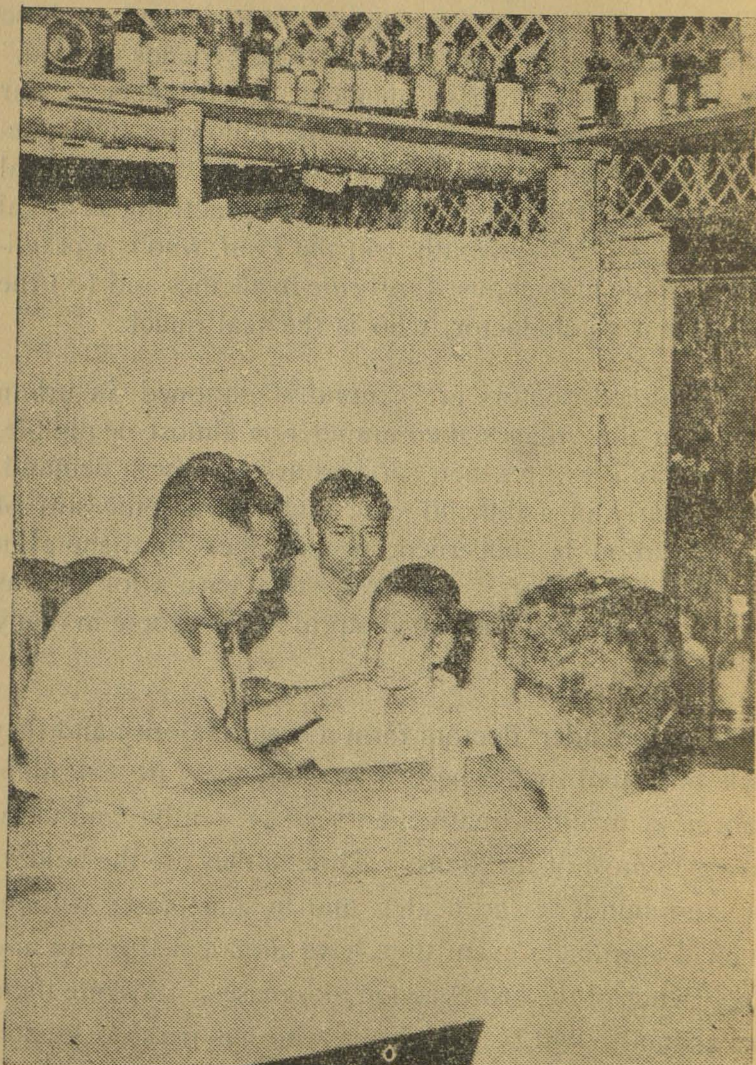
Though comparatively poor, the inhabitants of East Pakistan are on the whole a contented people. They do not want much, they have no hankering for luxuries of life, they are satisfied with simple *Dal-Bhat* which they have plentiful. But still they have worries to face and the greatest of such worries is the periodical visitations of diseases. Being a low-lying country with swampy marshes scattered all over, malaria is the number one enemy of the people. Then, there are also occasional attacks of waterborne diseases like Cholera, Diarrhoea, Typhoid, etc., and also of chicken and small-pox. Of late the prevalence of tubercolosis has also become somewhat wide-spread. To tackle this enormous problem of diseases Government is, of course, doing its utmost and UN aid through the agencies of WHO, UNICEF and such other international organisations is also coming in various forms. But due to the paucity of qualified doctors, particularly in the rural areas, successful tackling of the problem has become very difficult in most places.

Yet the fight against diseases is continuing unabated. The people in the villages have their own medicine-men, though in most cases these professionals are not perhaps better than quacks. But whether a quack or otherwise,

villagers have no other alternative but to depend on these people whom they justly consider to be "friends in need." Broadly speaking, these medical practitioners of our villages may be classified into the following five categories: (1) the qualified doctor with a genuine medical diploma, (2) the compounder, who is practising as a real doctor, (3) the homœpath, (4) the *Vaid,* who is a practitioner in the indigenous *Ayurvedic* medicines and (5) the *Ujha* or a witch-doctor, who is the real quack.

Qualified doctors are generally stationed in urban areas; in the villages their number is almost negligible. But where they are, their services are greatly in demand. Particularly in a difficult case and where some sort of an operation is concerned, people flock to them even from far-off villages. Generally they earn a lot and, as such, are in a position to be helpful to the people in many other ways.

Compounder doctors form a great majority and they will be found everywhere. In fact, they are the main source of medical treatment—both preventive and curative—in most of the areas. Though they are the holders of compounders' certificates, and in some cases without such a certificate even, they have practical training and experience of the profession in most cases. Among them occasionally will be found one who has perhaps greater practical experience than a new doctor and, as such, is more sought after.



A village doctor

The homeopath has also a "diploma" in most cases. But unfortunately some half-educated youngmen, who have failed to find any other occupation, have now-a-days become homœopaths in some places. Such doctors are really dangerous fellows. Some years ago the author came across one such homœopath who had the outward show of a big doctor, but was in fact worse than a quack. He diagnosed a case of serious type of pneumonia to be a case of simple worm-trouble with the result that a certain gentleman lost his only son quite unexpectedly. The poor father became broken hearted and wrote a pathetic elegy on the tomb-stone of the boy, the first four lines of which, if I remember correctly, were:

"The little angel, who came
With life and light, is gone;
Left behind in darkness
His parents live to mourn."

But whatever the case may be, there are some doctors among these homœopaths who have earned some reputation. Particularly in the case of children's diseases their services are greatly in demand. Cheapness of this variety of medicine is also contributing greatly towards the popularity of such doctors.

The *Vaid* is a famous fellow. In this part of the country he is known by the name of *Kaviraj*. *Ayurvedic* medicine, which he gives, is a costly stuff in most cases and probably that is why he is known as the medicine-man for *Rajas, Nawabs* and other wealthy people

throughout the country. But the *Kaviraj* prepares also cheap varieties of pills, pastes and extracts from various kinds of herbs which he gives to a poor man. In the case of malaria and some other common diseases *Ayurvedic* medicines cannot generally produce a quick result. But whatever the fact may be, an intelligent *Kaviraj* will not probably take defeat in such a case. He will try his best to fight the ailment as far as possible. Sometimes a *Kaviraj* may even transform a quinine pill into a small ball of greenish colour by soaking it in the juice extracted from *Tulsi* leaves which is, according to the *Ayurvedic* pharmacopœia, a medicine for malaria and similar fevers. The *Kaviraj* has, however, become quite a popular figure in some localities.

The Ujha or witch-doctor is also a famous person in our villages. Sometimes he gives herbal medicines of wonderful efficacy no doubt, but his principal form of practice is the giving away of charms and talismans. To drive away the demon of ailment on occasions he also recites over the patient unintelligible mystic verses known locally as *Mantras*. If a person is suffering from gout or lumbago, the *Ujha* will perhaps give him some sort of a root to wear around his waist. In such a case he may also give some kind of oil, sanctified by *Mantras* of course, to rub on the spot. But the *Ujha* is most sought after when a case of snake-bite happens anywhere. Simple villagers believe that in such a case a modern doctor has nothing to do, only an *Ujha* can save a person who has been bitten by a deadly cobra.

Innumerable stories are current in the countryside about the miraculous power of this or that *Ujha*, who is said to have revived a person presumed to be dead for six or seven days. Though nobody can claim personal knowledge of any such case, everybody believes these stories to be true and the *Ujha* is thus occupying a position of prestige and veneration among the village people.

Almost cent. per cent. of the *Vaids* and a great majority of the doctors were Hindus till some years ago. After the partition of the country some of them have unfortunately crossed over to the other side of the boundary. This uncalled for migration has naturally created



Inside a wara in a hospital

a void in our village life and the problem of medical treatment in the rural areas has become more difficult than before. But as in all other cases, the void in this field also is being gradually filled up and it is hoped that by the combined efforts of the Government and the people the position will improve day-by-day.

The medical practitioner—whether he is a doctor, a *Vaid* or an *Ujha*—is a very respected person in our villages. People know and are conscious of the fact that when even the near and dear ones feel helpless and can do nothing to ease the sufferings of an ailing person, the medical practitioner only can comfort him. Of course, most of the villagers are so poor that they cannot reasonably pay for medical treatment. But unlike the doctors of big towns, the village medicine-man is not an exacting person. In most cases he has no demand at all, he is satisfied with as much as the patient can pay and he does not mind even if the payment is very small. In a very poor case where the paying capacity of the patient is almost nill, the village doctor or the *Vaid* will not hesitate to accept some sort of payment in kind or even to attend such a case free.

The doctor and the *Vaid* being educated persons with a regular source of income, generally live a decent life. They have good dwelling houses and these houses are not only neat and tidy but charming too, probably with a small flower garden or a fine lawn in front. Villagers flock to such houses not for medical advice alone, but for guidance in other matters also. Sometimes they go there

to hear a newspaper read or to know all about the happenings in the town where a doctor or a *Vaid* goes very often. If an illiterate villager needs a letter to be written or to be read out, he will probably go to the house of a doctor or a *Vaid,* because he knows that writing and reading are familiar subjects in such a house. In a word, to a villager the doctor and the *Vaid* are not only 'friends in need' in medical matters, but in many other respects also. They are really lovable persons and a villager has nothing but faith and unbounded respect for them.



THE SCHOOLMASTER

The position of East Pakistan with regards to literacy is foremost among the provinces in Pakistan. Figures obtained during the Census of 1951 indicate that more than sixteen per cent. of the population here know how to read and write; while in the Punjab, Sindh and other parts of West Pakistan this percentage is much lower. Even in undivided Bengal the percentage of literacy in the districts now forming this eastern wing of Pakistan was considerably higher than that of the West Bengal districts. This march of letters is still continuing and it is hoped that a time will come soon when the position will improve further and we will be able to compare ourselves favourably with some advanced foreign countries even.

How was this favourable position achieved? The answer, and probably only one answer, to this question is that selfless work of the village schoolmasters from generations is mainly responsible for this wonderful achievement. There are about sixty thousand villages in this province. Each has at least one primary school, and there are villages where middle and high schools and *Madrasahs* also exist. If it is estimated that on the average every such school has three teachers, the total number of teachers in the province works out at 180,000

or in a round figure, about two lakhs. It is needless to point out that among this vast number of teachers those of the primary schools form a great majority and they are the real backbone of the educational system here.

Primary school teacher is generally an unassuming person. Prior to the introduction of free and compulsory primary education, there was a time when such a teacher, who was then called a *Guru,* used to get as his monthly pay the paultry sum of rupees five to ten from the District Boards. Of course, with this amount was also added the monthly tuition fee of the boys which was at the rate of one anna, two annas and in any case not more than four annas per boy. But this tuition fee could not probably exceed rupees five per month in most of the schools, and hence the teacher had to content himself with only rupees ten to fifteen per month. But in spite of such a small income, the *Guru* was a devoted teacher with an idealism of his own. In most cases imparting of knowledge was his sole mission and the question of self-interest could not come up in any way in the realisation of this sacred mission.

Some of these *Gurus* were really men of examplary character. I remember one such gentleman—a bearded saintly person—who taught me reading, writing and arithmetic during my childhood days. Saadat Ali Master, as he was known to everybody, was a teacher in every respect. He had an individual approach to every question and he could explain things in such a simple

way that the most difficult of problems became as easy as anything. He used to get as his monthly pay rupees eight only and probably another amount of rupees five or six was collected as tuition fee. But to our Master Sahib, as we dearly called him, it was really immaterial whether his earning was a big amount or a small one. Always he wore a satisfied and smiling look and had a loving temperament. He loved us—the boys—as his own and we had for him not only unbounded respect, but also deepest of affections. This noble soul is long dead, but I still remember him with so much veneration



Boys at a School lined up for a function

and warmth of heart that to my mind he was the greatest of all the teachers.

Unfortunately, such a teacher has become very rare now-a-days. According to the free and compulsory primary education plan every primary school has three teachers now, whose monthly pay ranges from rupees thirty-five to fifty. For a village dweller this is a respectable amount no doubt. But a teacher of today has become so professional that he has actually lost his soul. In most cases, unlike the *Gurus* of by-gone days, he goes to the school only to fulfil his professional obligations and not with the mission of imparting knowledge. Of course, days have become comparatively hard and a teacher has now many more problems and worries to solve. Probably that is one of the reasons that a teacher of today cannot wholly mind his profession and consequently the standard of teaching has greatly deteriorated.

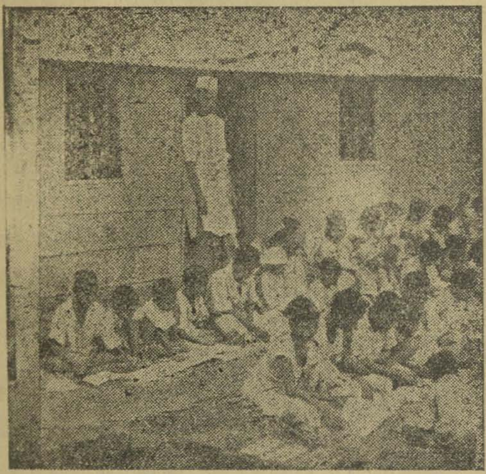
For the sake of truth this must also be said that existing curriculum and syllabus have also some responsibility in the matter. In our days we had only a Bengali reader, a book of arithmetic, a small book of local geography and a model deed and letter-writer in class III of a Primary School. Some boys also used to read an English spelling-book as optional subject. But now a small boy of class III has three language primers or readers (Bengali, Urdu and English), a history book, a book of geography in which more emphasis has been given to natural geography than the local one, a book of hygiene,

a book of arithmetic, a science book, a Bengali grammar, a book on religious instructions, a Bengali subsidiary reader, besides one or two key-books and others. In a word, more than a dozen books for the tender brain of a boy of seven or eight. Is it not too much a burden? But unfortunately nobody has any thought in the matter and the result is that we are producing thousands of almost uneducated Matriculates every year.

Be that what it may, it is a fact that our educational standard has gone down much and the gentlemen of the teaching profession must share the blame for this sad state of affairs at least to some extent.

Perhaps I have digressed much from my subject. Discussion or writing a dissertation on the educational system cannot be my business. I, therefore, return back to my subject—the teacher. In the villages he is one of the most respected persons. To an illiterate villager schoolmaster is the embodiment of all the knowledges that he can conceive. When a person is in some difficulty and requires a sound advice, invariably he will first of all go to a schoolmaster, who can offer proper advice in almost all matters, including a litigation. Writing of letters, filling-up of money-order forms or a jute licence, and even the writing of a sale or mortgage deed is the business of a teacher in the villages. As he is the most learned person, the village people come to him also to hear all the news that can be had from a newspaper. In

a word, to an ignorant villager the schoolmaster is something like a sage and seer and everbody has a special regard for him.



A Maktab in session

As the schoolmaster has many more functions to perform in addition to his normal professional duties, he is generally a very busy man. He remains in the school five or six hours every day. But where a schoolmaster is also a member of the Union Board or some other local body, which he is in some cases, he has a great number of jobs to perform in the mornings and evenings too. In some particular cases a schoolmaster is also chosen as a Juror and then he has to attend a judicial court even.

A learned person as he is, the schoolmaster is considered to be an aristocrat in the village society. In all the social functions he is in the front rank. As he

earns some cash money every month and has probably some landed property also, he is a bit well-off in most cases. Generally he has a good dwelling house with a decent siting-shed set apart. Be he a Hindu or a Muslim, his family life is a happy one and he feels proud that in the village society nobody can do without him.

In our villages we have also another class of teachers who run small *Maktabs* or Muslim theological schools at the mosques. These people are generally ignorant of modern sciences and have almost no knowledge of any subject excepting theology. Among them there are persons who still believe that the earth is a flat piece of land and that the sun is moving round the earth. However, it is gratifying that they do not propagate such ideas among the boys and girls who generally learn from them only the reading of the Holy Quran.

Most of the teachers of this class know perfectly well the reading of the Quran, but generally they do not know anything about its meaning. Among them there are some, known by the name of *Hafiz*, who can even recite the entire text of the Quran simply from memory. The village people have great respect for this class of theologians and it cannot be denied that though as teachers their contribution to the society is not probably very great, still they hold a position in our village life which is not at all negligible.

THE ZAMINDER

Zaminder !

Yes, in the over-all picture of life in East Pakistan, the Zaminder has also an important place.

But who is this important person? As the word *'Zaminder'* indicates, is he a tiller of the soil (*zamin*) or is he connected with the land in any other way? How came he to be a zaminder? Had he earned this position of influence by the sweat of his brow or by making any other sacrifices?

Answer to all these questions will, no doubt, be in the negative. Though in the Punjab and other parts of West Pakistan a zaminder is the real tiller of the soil, in East Pakistan the so-called zaminder had practically no connection whatsoever with the land. He earned this position of prestige not through toil or sacrifice; but on the contrary, as a reward for anti-people and unpatriotic activities during the early days of British rule in this country.

But at present no such person exists in East Pakistan. The State Acquisition Act of 1950 dealt a decisive blow against this medieval system of land tenure that was acting as an instrument of oppression against the people

since the days of Lord Cornwallis. The new Act has relieved the zaminders of their overlordship of landed interest that was bestowed upon them by the ill-famed Permanent Settlement Act of 1791. Government have now taken over all the big zaminderis and smaller ones will also be taken over gradually. Zaminders are thus going out of the picture for good.

But those days were not of a distant past, when the zaminder was an awesome object of veneration and even his name was sufficient to strike terror in the minds of the people. In fact, the zaminder was the mightiest of the mighty in the villages, his words were law, he could do and undo whatever he liked or wished. In those days the people had practically no right over the land, they could not fell a tree or excavate a pond and they were denied even the right of constructing a good pucca house to live in. Over and above, all sorts of illegal exactions were made from them, they were robbed of their hard-earned money on every kind of pretext; in a word, they were fleeced like anything.

Zaminders themselves were not perhaps directly connected with these acts of oppression and suppression in all the cases; but they were no doubt the presiding authorities over the nefarious machinery of oppression that consisted of the all-powerful *Nayeb, Tahsildar, Gomosta, Paik, Peyada, Barkandaz* and a horde of others. To save the people from this oppressing machinery, several legislative measures of tenancy reform were attempted

during the period of the last quarter century or so. And at last, after the achievement of Pakistan, the final blow was administered against this out-moded system in the shape of the new Act mentioned above, and thus the days of the zaminders have at last come to an end.

Though the system of zamindery is going to be a matter of the past very shortly and already a great number of zaminders, who were Hindus, have left this land, many of them have still their homes in the villages in almost every part of the province. Besides, there are hundreds of *Katcharis* scattered all over the province which were once the seats of *Nayebs* and *Tahsildars*, but are now manned by Government officials. These homes and *Katcharis* of the zaminders had in the past so much influence over the people that though at present no zaminder is there, the influence still continues.

But how? It is a known fact that all the zaminders or their *Nayebs* and *Tahsildars* were not blood-sucking demons, there were good people also among them. Due to good luck of the people where there was a noble-hearted zaminder or a good *Nayeb* or *Tahsildar*, the people in that area derived all sorts of benefits from them and they had the scope to prosper. For the education of the children of the people, schools and colleges were established in such places, dispensaries were opened for the treatment of the ailing and diseased, play-grounds, libraries and other amenities were also provided. These institutions were established and maintained by the

estates of the zaminders. The colleges at Karatia, Dhanbari, Paschimgaon and many more institutions of like nature may be cited as instances of benevolent zaminders' acts of generosity towards the people. Now, even after the acquisition of zaminderis by the Government, these noble institutions and others like them are still continuing to serve the people as they were doing previously. Their contribution in moulding the rural life in this part of the country cannot, therefore, be ignored.

In their days, some of the zaminders did much for the spread of culture in other fields also. The contribution of the zaminders of Gouripore (in Mymensingh)



A Zaminder's katchari as it was

for the development of classical music may be specially mentioned in this connection. Some of the zaminders also patronised poets and litterateurs or were themselves so. Zaminder of Natore, the late Maharaja Jagadindra Nath Ray, was himself a litterateur of repute and edited a first-class monthly magazine—*Manoshi-o-Marmabani*—for a period of more than a decade. Hasan Reza, the mystic poet of Sylhet, was also a zaminder. Maharaja Surjya Kanta Acharyya of Muktagacha was a great *Shikari* and wrote a beautiful account of his adventures in the jungles.

There were others who maintained wrestlers, formed football teams and did much for the development of sports in other spheres also. During the *Puja* season some of the Hindu zaminders used to bring down to their villages of residence touring theatrical parties from the town, which provided an annual occasion of amusement for the people.

The life as it was lived by the zaminders and members of their families, was one of luxury and amusement and, in some bad cases, even of debauchery and corruption. But with the abolition of zamindaris when a great majority of them have gone out of the province, a permanent curtain has been drawn over this life of luxury and corruption, that had only a bad influence over the people around.

The few zaminders or members of their families who have chosen to continue to live in their old homes as

private citizens and who have already displayed the good sense of giving up their high-brow attitude will, no doubt, endear themselves to the people around them and thus continue to have their influence over the rural populace—the peasant, the fisherman and all of them—who really contribute to the life in East Pakistan.



THE MULLAH AND THE BRAHMIN

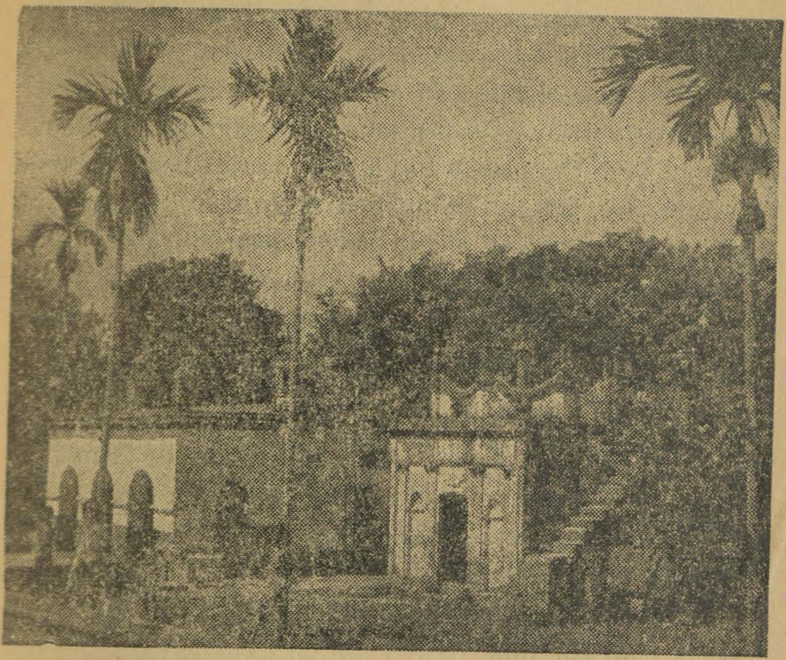
The people of East Pakistan, irrespective of caste and creed, are extremely religious minded. Inexhaustible bounties of nature with which the Creator has endowed this part of the world are probably responsible for such a mental make-up of the people. To the Muslims and the Hindus—the two major communities that inhabit this area—religion is not only a matter of belief, but a code of practice too. In most places they practise religion with the zeal of a fanatic and they believe that salvation of mankind lies not in the materialistic innovations, but in religion alone. Of course, modern tendencies are gradually gaining ground everywhere; but still the position with regard to religious matters remains almost unchanged, and the *Mullah* and *Brahmin* are playing the role of dictators in this field.

East Pakistan being a Muslim majority area, it has about seventy thousand mosques in its villages and towns, each with its *Imam* or *Mullah* who conducts the prayers. Besides, we have thousands of *Moulvis* also who are learned in theology and hence playing the role of exponents of religion, though they may be earning their living through other occupations and avocations. These people—the *Imam* of the mosque and the *Moulvi*—wield such an influence over the people that in the name of

religion they can do whatever they like. Generally a *Mullah* is so much respected by the people that he is considered to be a *Nayeb-i-Rasul* or a representative of the Prophet. No Muslim can, therefore, ignore a *Mullah* and dare go against his dictates, no matter whether he is an *Imam* or a plain *Moulvi*. In a word, the *Mullah* is an all-powerful being and he is actually playing a decisive role in our village society.

Generally the *Imam* of the mosque is the *Mullah* of a village and he controls the religious life of the people in conjunction with other *Moulvis* who may be resident in the neighbourhood. In a majority of the cases the *Imam* is a pious man and lives a simple life which is more or less free from worldly charms. Purposely he keeps aloof from local squabbles and, therefore, enjoys respect from all shades of people. He is a welcome person in every household and the people flock to him not only for instructions in religious matters, but also in connection with other social affairs, including the mediation in a dispute.

Among the social functions which a *Mullah* invariably attends, the marriage ceremony is most noteworthy. Of course, a Muslim marriage is more of a social contract than a sacrament. But it is the established practice that after the contract portion of a nuptial ceremony is over, the *Mullah* has to conduct a short service in which verses from the Holy Quran are recited. Without this being done no marriage ceremony is considered complete.



A village mosque

For his services at such functions the *Mullah* is generally handsomely paid.

To conduct a funeral service is exclusively a *Mullah's* function. He is the person under whose supervision the shroud, popularly known as *Kafan* (coffin), is made and the dead body washed and bathed. No person who is not a *Mullah* can perform these functions properly; because the shroud must be fashioned according to the specifications in the scripture and the bathing has also some religious rites connected with it. The funeral

service is a congregational prayer which the *Mullah* conducts and everybody present takes part in. Though on all other occasions the *Mullah* gets something as payment, he generally does not take anything for attending a funeral. On the fourth day after the death of a person his relations generally arrange a prayer service. A similar function is also held on the fourtieth day. The *Mullah* is specially invited to attend such functions. Invariably he is paid some amount on these occasions after being entertained at a sumptuous dinner.

Muslims have almost no other religious festival excepting the two *Eids*—the *Eidul-Fitr* or the festival in conclusion of the month of fasting and *Eidul-Azha* or the festival of sacrifice. But ever and anon they arrange *Milad* meetings also to discuss the life of the Prophet. Generally a *Mullah* conducts such meetings and he is always paid for this

Among the villagers the *Mullah* is most sought after for writing *Tawiz* or a talisman and also for reciting holy verses over an ailing person. The people have great faith on the efficacy of such talismans and the holy verses, and thus a village *Mullah* has also to perform the function of a doctor to some extent. Generally, the amount of five pice is paid to the *Mullah* for writing a *Tawiz*.

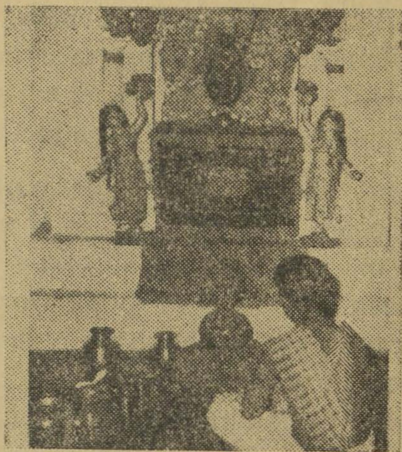
Though a man of pious temperament in most cases, the *Mullah* is generally ignorant of all modern knowledge. He has a fanatical approach to questions which are considered to be mere insignificant matters by average people.

According to a *Mullah's* ideas the keeping of a flowing beard is religiously obligatory on all Muslims; but to a modern educated person this question has nothing to do with religion. Similarly, the *Mullah* is the advocate of a severe *Purdah* or seclusion for a woman, but to a modern man such an idea is extremely reactionary. But in spite of all such differences of opinion, everybody has great regard for the *Mullah* and he is thus acting as the supreme dictator in the matter of religious conduct of the people.

The *Brahmin* is the exact counter-part of a *Mullah* in the Hindu society. According to the Hindu scriptures without the mediation of a *Brahmin* nobody can directly approach God, or in other words, perform a *Puja*. Generally, a Hindu has so many *Pujas* to perform throughout the year and on every such occasion he must invite a *Brahmin* to conduct the religious rites. The *Brahmin* has traditionally no other profession than this priestly job, though now-a-days many an educated *Brahmin* has taken up other professions. Throughout the year a priest *Brahmin* goes round from one house to the other of his disciples and does all the *Pujas* for them. Every Hindu has so much respect for a *Brahmin* that to feed him or to give him some sort of a present is considered by them to be an act of greatest piety. Thus the *Brahmin* is reigning supreme at the head of the Hindu social order and there is none to rival him.

The *Brahmin* is generally an educated person; an illiterate *Brahmin* will very seldom be found. Among them persons well-versed in the *Vedic* scriptures will be

found in great numbers who are generally known as *Pundits*. In behaviour and manners also the *Brahmin* has maintained his superiority. Of course, he has inherited a bad name in the matter of marriages. Previously a

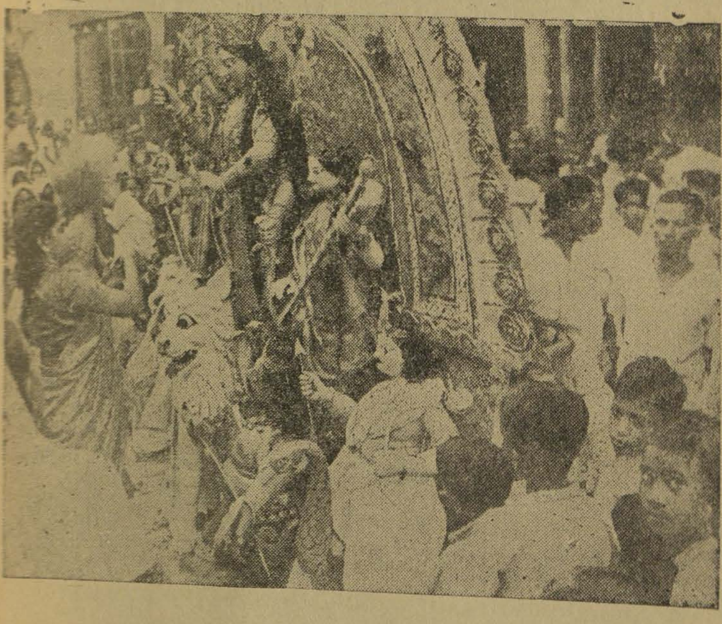


A Brahmin at puja

Kulin or pure-blood aristocratic *Brahmin* used to marry hundreds of wives without accepting any responsibility for their maintenance. It is said that such a *Brahmin* had sometimes even up to three hundred and sixty-five wives resident in different villages and he used to go round to them throughout the year stopping only one day in each of his wives' houses. But this is a story of the past and now a polygamous *Brahmin* will very seldom be found. The *Brahmin* has another bad name which has branded him a gourmand. Probably such a notion

is not altogether unfounded; temperamentally a *Brahmin* is a great eater even today.

As he lives a simple life, a *Brahmin* will not generally wear a sewn cloth. A *Dhoti* around his waist and a piece of cloth used as wrapper around his neck are all that a *Brahmin* of priestly order generally uses. He wears the sacred thread and often paints his forehead with sandal paste. Sometimes he has a pigtail also towards the back of his head. He is a vegetarian in most cases.



A Durga Puja scene

A *Brahmin's* house is undoubtedly the cleanest dwelling in a village. If one goes to such a house he will be charmed to notice complete absence of any kind of dirt in or around the house. Of course, the women-folk of a *Brahmin's* family are mainly responsible for such cleanliness. They are clean in their dress and mien too, and most of them possess a handsome and well-proportioned physique. Among them occasionally will be found even a damsel who can be classed as most beautiful. A *Brahmin* woman will never wear shoes. The idea of womanhood which they try to emulate is the ideal of *Sati* and *Savitri*, the two mythological characters famous for devotion to their husbands. They believe that the past, present and future of a woman or, in other words, her whole being is intensely connected with her husband —the man who first put the vermilion mark on her forehead on the day when she was wed. She not only loves her man, but worships him also as a god.

BADIA THE GYPSY

There is a class of people in East Pakistan who have made boats their 'homes'. For a greater part of the year they move from place to place on these boats. Most of these people have, of course, dwellings of their own in the villages also, but with these 'village homes' they have very little connection and they can better be called river-dwellers than the inhabitants of any village. They carry on the occupation of snake-charmers and sometimes that of pedlars who sell trinkets to the house-wives. Known by the common name of *Badia* or *Beday*, they are the gypsies of East Pakistan.

As snake-charming is the main occupation of such a *Badia*, he is also called a *Sapuria* or *Sapuray*. From jungles he captures all kinds of snakes including the deadly cobra and rattlesnake and the mighty python or the *Ajagar*, as the great snake is known to the local people. After relieving the snakes of their venom pouches the *Badia* displays them to the people at every place he visits and thus earns his living. The people generally enjoy such displays and they always pay the *Badia* quite a lot in cash or kind.

The boat on which a *Badia* moves from place to place is of a special type. Generally it is of medium size and has a hood covering almost three-fourths of its length.

The boat has several compartments so that an entire household with the trade-wares—snakes or trinkets—may be accommodated in it quite comfortably.

The *Badia* people move in convoys of twenty or more such boats with the headman, who is called a *Sardar*, in the lead. A *Sardar* is the all-powerful ruler, administrator and jurist of the entire community forming the convoy. He decides how many days they should stop at a place and what will be their next destination. Disputes are placed before him for settlement and his verdicts are accepted without question. For a serious offence he will not hesitate to order the wrong-doer even to be shoe-beaten in front of all the others. In such a case the culprit will submit to the decision of the *Sardar* and take all the humiliations without protest.

In case of a secret love affair detected between two members of separate boats the *Sardar*, after a long interrogation, will probably order the pair to be married soon. A *Badia* marriage is a simple affair in most cases. The groom gives the bride a few clothes and some ornaments —mostly of silver—and the ceremony is held at some anchoring place. Before the marriage function the groom will have to arrange a separate boat of his own, for which funds are generally provided by his father. After the marriage the couple move to the new boat and thus start their own 'home'.

The *Sardar* has to mediate in many a family quarrel. A husband often beats his wife for petty shortcomings;



A Badia with snakes

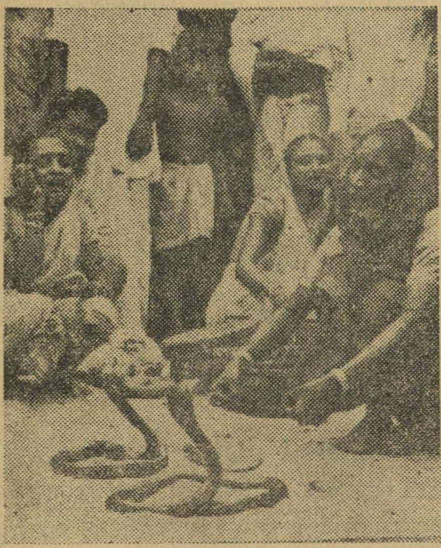
but in every boat there is a specified 'safety zone' where such beatings are strictly forbidden by established convention and usage. The wife, therefore, does not lose a moment to take shelter in the 'safety zone' when she finds that her husband has become furious and may strike her.

If any husband becomes so unthoughtful as to violate the sanctity of the 'safety zone' he will commit a great offence and the *Sardar* will have no mercy for him. But such a case very seldom occurs.

Badia women are generally more active than their men-folk. Every morning after preparing food and having their meals they will leave the boats with loads of trinkets on their heads or with snakes in covered bamboo baskets, selling trinkets from door to door or displaying the snakes. Some will also do some doctoring with herb medicines or by giving charms and talismans. These women are generally so shrewd and intelligent that they do not find any difficulty in inventing every time a new pretext for squeezing out money or some more measures of rice from the simple village housewives. When displaying snakes they will often sing a particular type of music known as *Sapuria's* songs. One of these songs tells the story of *Lakhindar* and *Behula*, a mythological pair. The story goes on to say how *Lakhindar*, the son of *Chand Sowdagar*, died of snake-bite and how his young wife *Behula* placed his corpse on a raft and thus floated down the river ultimately to reach the kingdom of *Yama-Raja* or the god of death. *Behula* presented herself before *Yama*, danced before him and pleased him so much that he gave back the life of her husband.

A snake-charmer sings this song in such a pathetic tune that the village people, particularly their women-folk, feel themselves transported and do not hesitate to

give to the charmer anything she demands. In this way a *Badia* woman earns much every day and after roaming about the villages throughout the day she returns 'home' in the boat before dusk. Generally every one of these



They sing Lakhindar's song while charming snakes

women has a well-proportioned physique full of health and vigour. As they charm the snakes, they themselves are also a charming lot.

When the women are away, men generally look after young kiddies and idle away their time in the boats by fishing with rod and line, or simply by singing some folk songs to accompaniment of music from stringed

instruments like *Dutara* or *Sarengi.* Of course, men also go out to the villages sometimes on snake-charming business, particularly when a big python, weighing two or three maunds, is to be displayed.

Most of the *Badia* people profess to be Muslims; but in practice they have very little of Islam in them. They lead their daily life according to a code of their own which is fashioned more according to witchcraft then Islam or any other recognised religion. Of course, among them there will be found occasionally some old men of religious habits, who perform prayers and observe other rituals strictly according to the injunctions of Islam. In some areas there are some Hindu *Badias* also. Their headman is known by the name of *Gusain* and they worship the snake-goddess *Bishahari or Manasa.*

These people—both men and women—are generally very brave and fearless. At two years' age a *Badia* child learns how to swim or to play with a snake. As boats are their 'homes', they are generally good navigators and are not afraid of bad weather. To cross a mighty river like Padma, Meghna or Brahmaputra amidst a storm is for them a matter of no importance at all. On boats they go from one end of the country to the other and they do not have any thought for the socalled 'home' on land which they have left behind, probably in a distant village. They feel proud that they do not belong to any particular area, the whole land is theirs.

THE TRIBESMAN

Though mainly a Muslim country with a fairly big Hindu minority, East Pakistan has also inside her boundaries a large number of tribal people who inhabit the hilly regions towards the east and the north. A great majority of these hill-tribes are of Mongolian origin; but there are among them some who are probably the descendants of early Austro-Dravidian races who peopled this area before the advent of the Aryans and the Muslims.

Among the Mongolian tribes, the *Chakmas* of Chittagong Hill Tracts are numerically the foremost. It is said that they were originally the residents of Arakan area of Burmah from where they first migrated to the southern parts of Chittagong district and then to the Hill Tracts area. At present almost the entire community of these people live in the Hill Tracts, and south Chittagong has turned into the home of another Tibeto-Burman tribe of Mongolian origin known as the *Maghs*.

After migration to Chittagong and Hill Tracts area the people of *Chakma* community began to intermarry freely with the original local residents and gradually adopted Bengali language as their spoken tongue.

During the later part of the Mughal rule in this country when Chittagong was annexed to the great empire, soldiers of the victorious Mughal army married a great number of tribal women and thus left traces of Mughal blood also amongst these tribesmen. Perhaps that is why all the *Chakma* Chiefs from the time of Sher Daulat, a seventeenth-century ruler, continued to bear pure Muslim names with the nomenclature of *Khan* till the advent of Rani Kalindi during the early part of the nineteenth century. Rani Kalindi adopted the Hindu cult and with the help of the Brahmins compiled a mythological story about the origin of the tribe, which runs as follows:

"In ancient times there reigned a *Kshatrya* king at Champanagar, the capital city of the principality known by the name of *Anga*. The king was of the Sun race. He had two sons, Bijoygiri and Samagiri. In the hope of conquering new lands Bijoygiri set forth towards the east at the head of a big army. He crossed the 'sea' of *Meghna* and conquered the kingdom of Arakan by defeating its ruler. Later on, the conqueror decided to settle in his new kingdom and thereupon made terms with the Arakanese king. He settled down in the south Chittagong near the bank of the *Naf* river. His people began to intermarry with the Arakanese and gradually adopted Buddhist religion. Subsequently they migrated to the valley of river *Matamuhri,* where traces of their ancient settlement still exist. The most powerful of the Chiefs of this dynasty was Sher Daulat. He was endowed with supernatural powers and use to purify himself from sin



They are going to a bazar

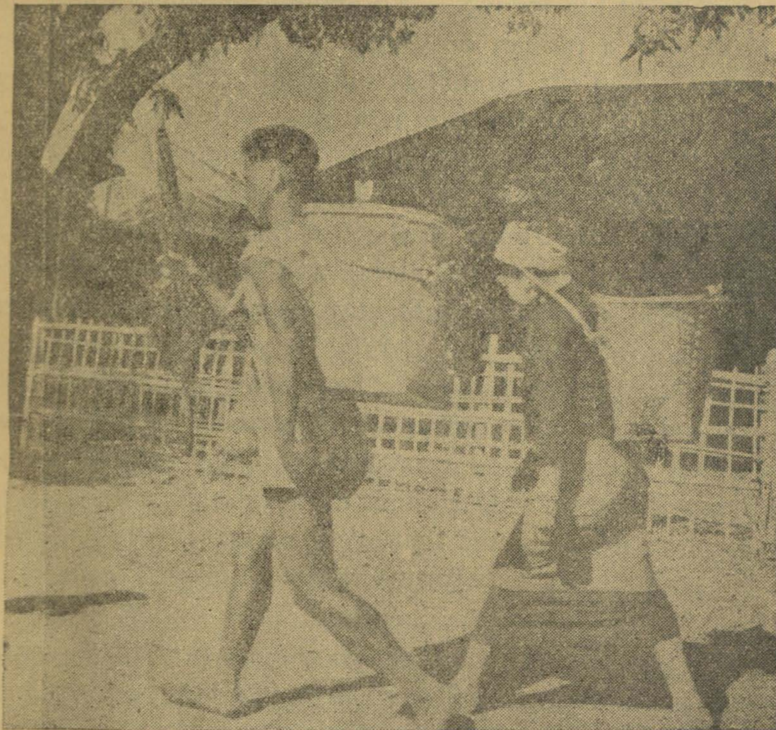
by bringing out his intestines to wash in holy waters and then again replacing the same inside his body. This he used to do in strict secrecy. But one day out of curiosity his wife watched the procedure and was detected in doing so. She was immediately slain and in a fit of anger Sher Daulat killed all the members of his family. He was, however, later on assassinated by his people when his tyranny became unbearable. But the people became afraid of the consequences of regicide and the whole tribe removed itself further north and settled in the neighbourhood of Rangunia from where they gradually spread out

towards the east and north, thus occupying the region which they now inhabit."

An interesting story no doubt, though probably to a historian it is almost of no value. But there is no denying the fact that Sher Daulat was really a very powerful Chief and he was ultimately assassinated by his people. The story tells that the *Chakmas* adopted Buddhism as their religion; but in fact they now profess a cult which is nothing but an admixture of Buddhism, Hinduism and the ancient Animism. In belief whatever they may be, in their day-to-day life they have proved themselves to be honest, truthful and law-abiding a people.



A Chakma mother



On the way to the town

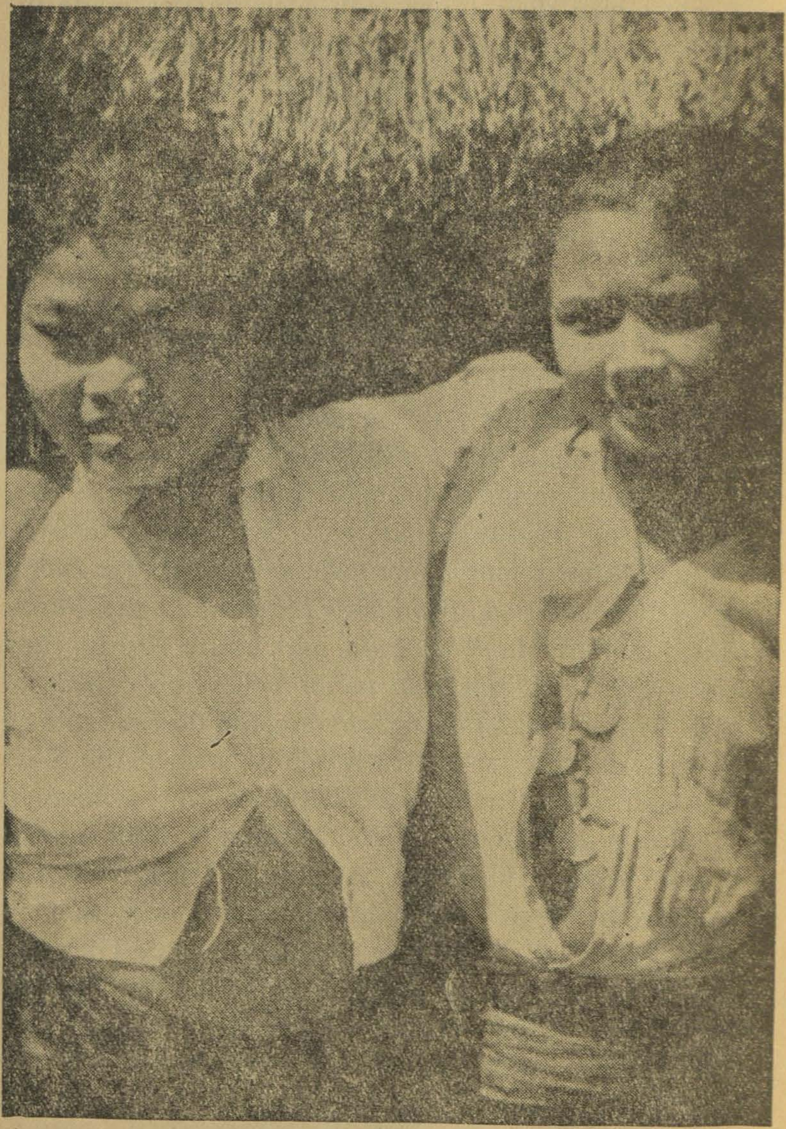
The main occupation of the *Chakmas* is agriculture. They prefer a primitive system of cultivation known as *Jum* method. A hillside is generally selected for this type of farming. In January and February the jungle of the hill-side is cut and left to dry in the sun for two months. In April the dry jungle is set on fire, which reduces all but the big trees into ashes. The debris is then cleared to make the

ground fit for sowing. No attempt is made to turn the soil with a plough or spade. With the advent of the rains when the ground is sufficiently saturated, sowing commences and the *Jum* is planted with a mixed variety of seeds of paddy, maize, cotton, pumpkin and a few other local vegetables. All the seeds are mixed in a basket and the *Jumia,* as the *Jum* farmer is called, with a *Dao* in his hand digs small holes in the ground and drops a handful of mixed seeds into every hole. The maize ripens towards the end of July, the paddy and vegetables are ready for harvesting in September and October and the cotton in November or December. Except occasional weeding and protection of the crop from the depredations of wild animals the *Jumia* has nothing more to do. It is gathered that average yield is between 25 to 30 maunds of paddy for every maund of seed sown.

As a class the *Chakma* people are noted for cleanliness. Though they live in primitive bamboo huts, in most cases these huts and their environs are kept neat and tidy. In dress also they give a general impression of cleanliness, though in some cases they are found to be scantily dressed. While at home a *Chakma* woman will not generally use any garment for the upper portion of her body; a simple home-woven cloth wrapped around the waist is all that she wears. But when going out to a *bazar* or to the house of a relation in some other village she will invariably wear a breast-binder or some other garment for the upper portion of the body. Generally *Chakma* women are very fond of ornaments and will

profusely adorn their limbs with such fineries made of silver, brass or bronze. Where such ornaments are not available they will not miss the opportunity of using even jungle flowers for beautifying themselves. Though like all the Mongolian races the *Chakma* has a flat nose and small eyes, he has a good physique and his women folk are generally a charming lot.

The *Maghs* who inhabit the southern parts of Chittagong, particularly the Cox's Bazar subdivision of that district, are numerically the second biggest tribes-people in East Pakistan. There will be found some *Maghs* in the Hill Tracts area and a small colony of them is also resident in the southern parts of Bakarganj district. There are three groups among these people: the *Jumia Maghs*, the *Roang* or *Rakhaing Maghs* and the *Barua Maghs*. *Jumia Maghs* live on agriculture and as they produce crops through *Jum* method they are called so. The *Roang* or *Rakhaing Maghs* are the descendants of those early refugees who fled to Chittagong at the close of the eighteenth century when Arakan was conquered by the Burmese. In most cases they bear Burmese names and their spoken language is also Burmese. *Barua Maghs* are the offspring of Arakanese mothers by Bengali fathers or Bengali women by Burmese men. They live in the plains and earn their living by agriculture like the local people. *Maghs* dress in Burmese style and temperamentally their women folk have a liking for multi-coloured fashionable dress. On the whole, they are



Two Chakma beauties

good-looking people and have, in most cases, a charm of their own.

Other tribal people who live in the hills of Chittagong and Hill Tracts area are the *Tipras, Mekhlis, Mrongs, Kukis, Pankos* and *Khayengs.* Though separately named, all of them, excepting probably *Tipras* and *Mekhlis,* belong to the *Kuki* group of aboriginals. In most of the cases they live in deep forests far away from any kind of civilisation. Almost all of them dress scantily and live on fruits and roots of the jungles and by hunting.

In Sylhet district there is a colony of *Manipuri* settlers who came to this area after the advent of Chaitanya Deva, the founder of *Vaishnava* sect of Hinduism. They



Magh children

adopted the cult of *Vaishnavism* and Sylhet being the birth place of the father of Chaitanya considered this place to be a holy land and, therefore, chose to settle there permanently. Generally they are very meek and mild and physically almost all of them are beautiful.

In Sherpur and Susang areas of Mymensingh district along the foot of the Garo Hills live some tribal people known as *Garo, Hajang, Koch* and *Hadi.* All of them, no doubt, belong to the *Garo* group and are of a dark complexion. They live mostly on agriculture and are noted for their simplicity and truthfulness.

Towards the north, particularly in the districts of Rangpur, Dinajpur and Bogra some *Santhals, Oraon* and *Munda* settlers will be found. They came from the Santhal Parganas and the Chhota Nagpur plateau. Some *Koches* from Assam have also come to settle in these areas. Of them, the *Santhals,* though as black as ebony, are renowned for their perfect physique. They supply a major portion of agricultural labour in the localities they live in. Among the local people they are known as *Bono* or dwellers of the jungles.

As in all other countries, the tribesman of East Pakistan is also a child of nature. Far from the civilising influences he lives in his jungle abode a life of primitive simplicity. Food he produces in sufficient quantity in his *Jum* and the jungle is full of animals which he can at his will hunt for meat. To clothe him—though sometimes very scantily—he produces cotton which his women folk spin and weave. Other necessaries of life

he either does not require or the jungle has sufficient supply of them, if at any time he needs any. He has, therefore, no hankering for anything and he whiles away his time in merry making—in singing and dancing. Very often festive parties are held in which all the young members of the community—both male and female—participate and freely mix with each other. When in such a party young girls and their boy-friends hand-in-hand dance round and sing their own folk-songs in a jungle tune, it is really a sight to be seen and appreciated. One who has witnessed such a tribal festival cannot but think that these children of the jungle are really a happy lot and civilised men must learn the secrets of happiness from them.



AND THE REST

In the course of the foregoing pages an attempt has been made to present an inside picture of life in East Pakistan as it is lived by different categories of people. In doing so all the principal professions and occupations have been dealt with; but still the picture is not complete in all its details. There are others too—the people belonging to minor occupations and avocations—who form an integral part of the picture.

Among this category, the washerman comes to mind first. Of course, ordinary village folk do not generally require the services of a washerman, they do their laundry work themselves. Still in some villages there are a few washermen who mainly work for aristocratic and wealthy families. By caste these people belong to the Hindu community and they are known by the name of *Dhobi* or *Dhopa*. Their number is so small that nowhere are they able to form a society of their own and, therefore, social contacts of a *Dhobi*—excepting marriages of course—are with other castes of the Hindu community.

As a *Dhobi* has not sufficient washing business to perform, in most places he has some agricultural holdings also. But he is known to everybody as a washerman and not as a farmer.

A *Dhobi* is reputed for his cleanliness and his women folk are generally so beautiful that even ancient poets have written of them. The famous story of a love affair between the *Brahmin* youth Chandidas and a *Dhobi* girl Rami is a noteworthy classic of old Bengali literature.

There is another class of interesting people in East Pakistan known as *Bairagi*. They are the *Vaishnava* mendicants and live in convent-like establishments known as *Akhras*. In every such *Akhra* a group of *Bairagi*—both male and female—live together and go about the villages singing and begging. With a one-stringed instrument called *Ektara* in hand a *Bairagi* or his female counterpart the *Baishnavi* will go from door to door of the villagers like a minstrel and sing to them *Kirtans*, one of the most popular variety of songs current in this part of the country. Every villager gives to such a *Bairagi* or *Baishnavi* some measures of rice and that is how this mendicant class maintains itself. Previous to the partition of the country this class of people were very popular in almost every part of the province; but now their number has decreased considerably and they will be found only occasionally here and there.

Among the Hindus there is another class of people known by the common name of *Barui* or *Barori*. Their main occupation is the cultivation of betel leaves and they are found in villages throughout the province. As the business in betel leaves is their monopoly, they are generally a well-off people. In some localities these people

have bettered their position so much that from amongst them have come out some exceptionally brilliant persons. This community has a bright future, no doubt.

Chamars are another class of Hindus who are generally leading a very lowly life in some parts of the province. Collection of hides and skins from the carcasses of dead animals is their main occupation, though some of them also conduct business as general traders in the line. In some places a section of them work also as shoe-menders. They are known as *Muchis*.

These people generally live as a compact community in some particular villages of their own. It is peculiar that when speaking these people are in the habit of using a nasal accent to every word they pronounce, though all the other villagers around them speak differently. Everywhere in the *Chamar* villages they speak in the same way. Most of these people are very poor and live in small hovels. In habits they are probably the nastiest people. They eat even the meat of dead animals and their houses are generally kept so unclean that for an outsider it is really very difficult to pass through a *Chamar* village.

As Hindus these *Chamars* are worshippers of idols, of course. Goddess *Kali* is their favourite deity.

Now, about the tailors. Almost every village has its own tailor and there are tailors' shops in every *bazar* also. Previously this job was almost a monopoly of the Muslims; but now some Hindus of the *Bhadralog* class have also come forward to try their luck in this vocation.

Of course, such Hindu tailors will mostly be found in the towns; village tailors are mostly Muslims. Generally they come from the agricultural class and, hence, tailoring is more or less a secondary occupation for them. However, they are really doing an essential service to clothe the people properly and if considered from this point of view, they cannot but be regarded as a very important element in our village society.

Among the Muslims of East Pakistan there exists a small class of people known as *Nakarchi*. This word is of Persian origin and means a drummer. But now-a-days a *Nakarchi* is not only a drummer, he is something of a bandmaster too. His services are, therefore, greatly in demand at the time of a marriage ceremony and similar festivities.

Though a Muslim, the *Nakarchi* is generally looked down upon by his other co-religionists. But in spite of such an ostracism this neglected community has produced a musical wizard like Ustad Alauddin Khan, who comes from a village in Tippera district of this eastern province of Pakistan. His advent has, no doubt, added much prestige to this community.

There are also small artisan classes like the *Sankharis* of Dacca who are the manufacturers of conch-shell bangles, the umbrella menders of Faridpur, makers of reed mats at Khulna and the cane and bamboo workers of Sylhet and Comilla. Their activities are localised in some particular areas only, and, as such, in the over all picture of the province they actually occupy a position

which is probably not very noteworthy. But there they are, and we must recognise their existence.

And lastly, some words about the townsman who is generally favourably placed economically and, hence, considers himself to be a big voice in public affairs. But who is he? In most cases he is nothing but a parasite on the common man—the villager—who is the real producer of wealth. The lawyer, the doctor, the official, the trader and all the others who dwell in the towns do not produce an ounce of wealth for the nation; but still they live a fashionable life on the wealth produced by neglected village people—the farmer, the fisherman, the weaver and all the others like them.

The townsman is generally a self-centred fellow, he has no thought for others, he does not like the idea that for anybody's sake he will have to sacrifice a bit of his pleasures. Probably that is why it is found that no society actually exists among the town-dwellers.

But in spite of such aloofness, a section of the townspeople is really doing some commendable service for the nation. They are the labour class at an industrial town. Like the farmer of the villages, the factory labourer is also an important citizen and he has a definite role to play in the making of our nation.

THE END

EBGP-55/56-3619F-3300.